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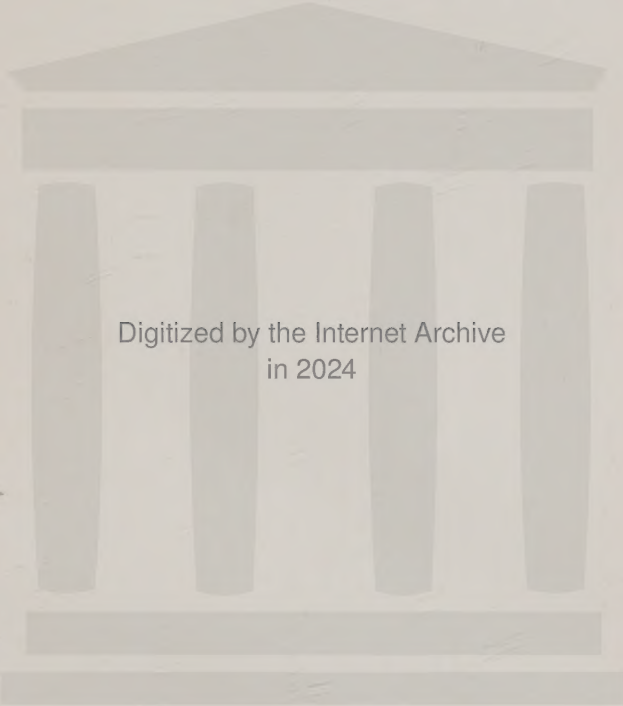
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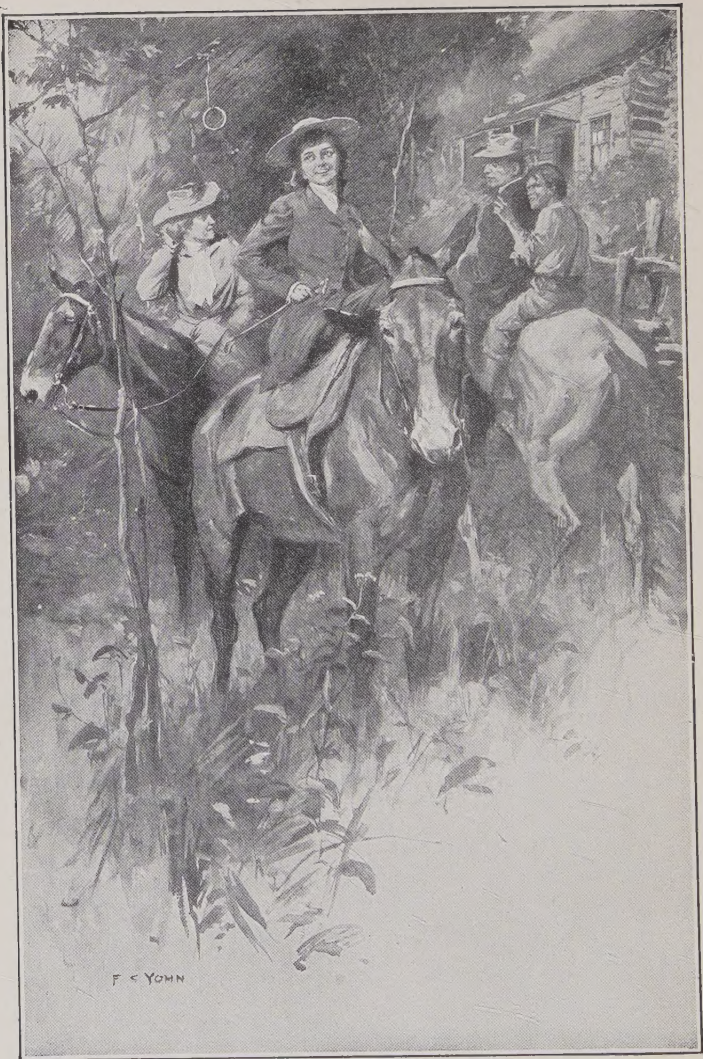


THE KENTUCKIANS

A KNIGHT OF THE
CUMBERLAND



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"Mart's a-gittin ready fer a tourneyment."

THE KENTUCKIANS

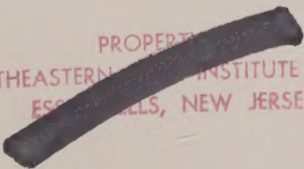
A KNIGHT OF THE CUMBERLAND

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THE KENTUCKIANS

TO
MY FATHER
AND MY FATHERS
KENTUCKIANS

I

THE people of the little Kentucky capital do not often honor the gray walls of their state-house. The legislators play small part in the social life of the town. A member must have blood, as well as gifts unusual, who can draw from the fine old homes a people with a full century of oratory and social distinction behind them, and, further back, the proud traditions of Virginia. For years young Marshall was the first to quite fill the measure, and he was to speak that afternoon. The ladies' gallery was full, and the Governor's daughter, Anne, sat midway. About her was a sudden flutter and a leaning forward when Marshall strode a little consciously down the aisle and took his seat. When he rose to speak, the quick silence of the House was a tribute to thrill him.

It was oratory that one hears rarely now, even in the South. There was an old-fashioned pitch to the vibrant voice, the fire of strong feeling in the fearless eye, an old-fashioned grace and dignity of manner, and a dash that his high color showed to be not wholly natural. The speech

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was old-fashioned, emotional, the sentences full, swinging, poetic, rich with imagery and classical allusion. And always—in voice, eye, bearing, and gesture—was there gallant consciousness of the gallery behind. More than once his eyes swept the curve of it; and when he came to pay his unfailing tribute to the women of his land, he turned quite around, until his back was upon the Speaker and his uplifted face straight toward the Governor's daughter, who moved her idle fan and colored as many an eye was turned from him to her.

The Speaker's gavel lay untouched before him when the last period rang through the chamber. It would have been useless against the outbreak of applause that followed. Marshall had flamed anew from an already brilliant past. Anne was leaning back with luminous eyes and a proud heart. The gallant old Governor himself was hurrying from under the gallery to bend over his protégé and grasp his hand. The pit of the house buzzed like a hive of bees. Down there a Greek passion for oratory was still alive; in the older men the young fellow stirred memories that were sacred; and the hum rose so high that the sharp rap of the gavel went through it twice unnoticed, then twice again, more sharply still. The Speaker's face was turned to one dark corner of the room where, under the big clock, stood

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the rough figure of a mountaineer, with hands behind him and swaying awkwardly from side to side, as though his tongue were refusing him utterance. Once he cleared his throat huskily, and a smile started on many a face, and quickly stopped, for it was plain that the man's trouble was not embarrassment, but some storm of feeling that threatened to engulf his brain and surge out in a torrent of invective. The mountaineer himself seemed fearful of some such thing; for, with turbulent calmness, he began slowly, and went on with great care. No reason was apparent, but at the sound of his voice the House turned toward him with the silence of premonition. One by one wrinkles came into the Speaker's strong, placid face. Marshall, quick to feel merit and generous to grant it, had straightened in his chair. The old Governor, going out, was halted by the voice at the door. And one, who himself loved the Governor's daughter, remembered long afterward that she leaned suddenly toward the man, with her eyes wide and her face quite tense with absorption. The secret was in more than his simple bigness, more than his massive head and heavy hair, in more even than the extraordinary voice that came from him. It was an electric recognition of force—the force with which Nature does her heavy work under the earth and in the clouds; and here and there

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an old member knew that a prophet was among them.

It was the old fight—patrician against plebeian, crude force against culture—but the House knew that young Randolph Marshall, who already challenged the brilliant traditions of a great forefather, who was a promise to redeem a degenerate present and bring back a great past, had found an easy peer in the awkward bulk just risen before them, unknown.

There was little applause when the mountaineer was done. The surprise was too great, the people were too much moved. Adjournment came at once, and everybody asked who the man was, and nobody could tell. One member, who still stood gripping his own wrist hard, recalled on a sudden the recent death of a mountain representative; and, on a sudden, the old Governor at the door remembered that he had signed credentials for somebody to take a dead member's place. This was the man. Outside, Anne Bruce came slowly down the oval stone stairway, and at the bottom Marshall was waiting for her. She smiled a little absently when he raised his hat, and the two stepped from the Greek portico into the sunlight and, passing slowly under the elms and out the sagging iron gate, turned toward the old Mansion. On the curb-stone, just outside, stood one of the figures familiar to the

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streets of the capital, a man in stripes — a “ trusty ” on parole—whose square, sullen jaw caught Anne’s attention sharply, as did the sign of force in a face always. A moment later, the big mountaineer stopped there and talked kindly with the convict awhile. Then, still in a tremor, he moved on alone, across the town and through the old wooden bridge over the river, then out to Devil’s Hollow and the hills.

II

THE sun must climb mountains first—the Cumberland range, that grim and once effectual protest against the march of the race westward. Over this frowning wall, the first light flashes down through primitive woods and into fastnesses that hold the sources of great rivers and riches unimagined, under and on the earth; beyond, it slants the crests of lesser hills and bushy knolls that sink by-and-by to the gentle undulations of blue-grass pasture and woodland; south and west then, catching the spire of convent and monastery, over fields of pennyroyal, and finally through the Purchase — last clutch of the Spaniard — to light up the yellow river that holds a strange mixture of soils and people in the hollow of its arm.

Something more than a century ago the range gave way a little, as earth and water must when the Anglo-Saxon starts, but only to say, "You may pass over and on, but what drops behind is mine; and I hold my own." To-day its woods are primeval, its riches are unrifled, and its peo-

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ple are the people of another age—for the range has held its own.

These men of the mountains and the people of the blue-grass are the extremes of civilization in the State. Through the brush country they can almost touch hands, and yet they know as little and have as little care of one another as though a sea were between them. A few years ago there was but one point where they ever came in contact, one point where their interests could clash. That was the capital, the lazy little capital, on both sides of the river between the big, sleepy hills, with its old, gray wooden bridge, its sturdy old homes, its State buildings of gray stone and classic porticos, and its dead asleep, up in the last sunlight, around the first great Kentuckian—the hunter Boone. There the river links highland with lowland like an all but useless artery, barren hill-side with rich pastureland, blue-grass with rhododendron, deterioration with slow progress, darkness with light that sometimes is a little dim, the present century with the last. The big hills about the town are little mountains that have followed the river down from the great highlands, and have brought with them mute messengers—mountain trees, mountain birds, and mountain flowers—to ask that the dark region within be not wholly forgot, and to show that the wish of Nature at least is

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for brotherhood. Down this river come wild raftsmen, who stalk along the middle of the street, single file and curiously subdued; who climb through the car windows, and are swept through the blue-grass, to trudge the old Wilderness Road back home. Here are two points of close contact for the mountaineer and the lowlander—the legislature and the penitentiary. Thirty miles away is an old university—the first college built west of the Alleghanies—where a mountaineer drifted in occasionally to learn to teach or to preach. Nowhere else and in no way else had the extremes ever touched, until now, for the first time in history, they were in conflict.

A feud—one of those relics of mediæval days that had been held like a fossil in the hills—had broken out afresh. It was called the Keaton-Stallard “war” in the mountains, and it had been giving trouble a long while. Recently the county judge had been driven from the court-house, and the Attorney-General of the State had gone with soldiers to hold court at the county-seat. The only verdict rendered during the term was against the General himself for carrying a weapon concealed; and a heavy fine was imposed for the same which the Governor had to remit. Meanwhile the feudsmen were out in the brush, waiting. When the soldiers went back to the

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blue-grass, they came out from their hiding-places and began over again. Now it was worse than ever. The Keatons had got the Stallards besieged not long since, and the Keaton leader tried to get a cannon. In good faith, and with a humor that was mighty because unconscious, he had tried to purchase one from the State authorities—from the Governor himself. Judge, jailer, sheriff, and constable were involved now, and the county was nearing anarchy.

The reputation of the State was at issue, and civilization in the blue-grass was rebuking barbarism in the mountains. Abolish the county, was the cry at the capital, and that afternoon Marshall had voiced it. He had been taken off guard. He had gone down the current of tradition, catching up straws that are anybody's for the catching—stock allusions to wolf-scalps and pauperism; scathing mountain lawlessness as a red blot on the 'scutcheon of the State, which, to quote the spirit of his talk, had stained the highland border of the commonwealth with blood, and abroad was engulfing the reputation of the lowland blue-grass; contrasting, finally, the garden-spot of the earth, his own land of milk and honey, with the black ribs of rock and forest that still harbor the evil spirit of the Middle Ages. It had never been better done, for under the humor and easy good-nature of the

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speech were a quivering pride of State and a bitter arraignment of the people who were bringing it into disrepute. The mountaineer was a straggler, a deserter from the ranks. He was vicious, untrustworthy, ignorant, lawless, and content with his degradation. He was idle, shiftless, hopeless; a burden to the State, a drawback to civilization. That was the plain truth under Marshall's courteous words, and, well told as it was, it would have been better told had he known the presence of the rough champion who, answering just that truth, tore apart his loose net-work with the ease of summer lightning lifting the horizon at dusk. His was a voice from the wilderness; it bespoke a new and throbbing power in the destiny of the State; it proclaimed a commercial epoch. He admitted much, he denied somewhat, he made little defence, and he apologized not at all. His appeal was for fairness—that was all; and it was fierce, passionate, and tender. He was a mountaineer. He lived in the county under discussion, in the town where the feud was going on. More, an uncle of his had once been a leader of the Stallard faction. His people were idle, shiftless, ignorant, lawless. No wonder. They had started as backwoodsmen a century ago; they had lived apart from the world and without books, schools, or churches since the Revolution; they had had a

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century of such a life in which to deteriorate. Their law was lax. They lived apart from one another as well, and, of necessity, public sentiment was weak and unity of action difficult—except for mischief. It was easy for ten bad men to give character to a community—to embroil ninety good ones. And that was what had been done. The good ninety were there for every ten that were bad. Nobody deplored the feud more than he, but he saw there were times when people must take the law into their own hands. The mountain people must in the end govern themselves, and they could not begin too soon. To disrupt the county would be to take away the only remedy possible in the end. Then the heavy brows lifted, and a surprising challenge came. By what right and from what high place did the people of the blue-grass rebuke the people of the mountains? Were they less quick to fight? In one section, the fighting was by individuals; in the other, families and friends for a good reason took up the quarrel. Was not that the great difference? And for whom was there the less excuse? For the people who knew, or for the ignorant; for them who could enforce the law, or for them who, because of their environment, were almost helpless? Who knew how powerful that environment had been? Who knew that it did not make the mighty dis-

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tinctions between the mountaineers and the people of the blue-grass; that the slipping of a linchpin in a wagon on the Wilderness Road had not made the difference between his own family and the proudest in the State; that the gentleman himself was not scoring his own kin? Why not? And with stirring queries like these he closed like a trumpet over the future of his much-mocked hills when their riches were unlocked to their own people and to the outer world. It was the man that made the sensation. What he said, at another time and from another source, would have got scant attention and no credence. But two facts spoke for him now: already a tide of speculation was turning into those little-known hills, and there before the House was at least one human product of them who plainly could force the question to be handled with serious care.

It was the power of the speech that stung Marshall. The matter of it was of little moment to him. Once in a while he had chased a red fox from the blue-grass to the foot-hills. As a boy, he had gone with his father on annual trips to the Cumberland to fish and to hunt deer. The Marshalls even owned mountain lands somewhere, which, with their sole crop of taxes, had been a jest in the family for generations. That was the little he knew of his own mountains.

He had cared even less; but, while he listened, his sense of fairness made him quickly sorry that he had spoken with such confidence when there was room for any doubt; and before the mountaineer was done he was silently and uneasily measuring strength with him, point by point.

To Anne, the man and the speech were a revelation: she barely knew her State had mountains. She hardly spoke on her way home, and she seemed not to notice Marshall's unusual silence.

"He has the fascination of something new and perhaps terrible," she said once. "And it's startling, what he said. I wonder if it can be true?" And again, a moment later, slowly: "It is very strange; it all seems to have happened before."

Marshall's answer was a little grim:

"Once is enough for me, I think."

"You and your speech," she went on, barely heeding his interruption. "It seemed as though I had already heard you make just that speech under just those circumstances. It's one of those queer experiences that seem to have occurred before, down to minute details."

"That was the trouble," said Marshall, quietly. "I made that speech, practically, on my graduating-day. I hadn't studied the question since."

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Anne's face cleared. "Oh, that's the explanation! A thing seems to have happened before, I suppose, because it has so nearly happened that it seems to be exactly the same thing."

"Yes," assented Marshall, but he was watching Anne steadily. He was already smarting with humiliation, and it hurt him that she could be so absorbed as to carelessly press the thorn in his flesh still farther in, and apparently not guess or not care how it rankled.

"Once even that man's face seemed familiar," she added. "I'd like to know all about him." They had reached the steps of the Mansion, and Marshall was taking off his hat.

"Make him tell you."

Anne looked up quickly. "I will."

"Good-by."

Anne smiled. She was accustomed to that tone; she had forgiven it many times; she had been distraught, and she would forgive it again.

"Good-by," she said gently.

III

IT was Saturday, and Marshall always spent Sunday at home. It was the run of an hour to Lexington on the fast train, and at sunset he was in a buggy, behind a little blooded mare, and on one of the white turnpikes that make a spider's web of the blue-grass, speeding home. A red arc of the sun was still visible just behind the statue of the great Commoner, and across the long, low sky one cloud in the east was still rosy with light. Already the dew was rising, and when he swept down over a little bridge in a hollow the air was deliciously cool and heavy with the wet fragrance of mint and pennyroyal. On either side the vespers of a song-sparrow would radiate now and then from the top of a low weed, and a meadow-lark would rise and wheel, singing, toward the west. Marshall's chin was almost on his breast. The reins were loose, and the noble little mare was plying her swift legs so easily under her that her high head and shining back gave hardly a sign of effort. She let the dark have barely time to settle over the rolling fields before she stopped of her own accord at her master's home

gate. Marshall got out with some difficulty, and, without a word of command, she walked through the gate and waited for him to climb in. The buggy made no noise on the thick turf, and no one was in sight when he reached the stiles.

“Tom!”

“Yessuh!”

The voice came from a whitewashed cabin behind a clump of lilac, and an old negro shuffled hastily after it. The young fellow's voice was impatient. A woman's figure appeared in the doorway under the sunrise window-light as Marshall climbed the stiles.

“Rannie!”

“Yes, mother,” he answered; and he held his breath while she kissed him. It was a big hall that he entered, with a graceful, semi-Oriental arch midway, and two doors opening on either side. The parlor was lighted, and through its door old furniture and old portraits were visible; and ancient wall-paper, brought from England a century since, blue in color, with clouds painted under the high ceiling, and an English stag-chase running entirely around the four walls. The ring of girlish laughter came down the stairway as Marshall passed into the dining-room. His mother had gathered in a little house-party of girls from the neighborhood, as she often did, to

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brighten his home-coming. Supper was over, and they were awaiting the arrival of young men from town. Marshall ate little and had little to say, and very slowly a shadow passed over his mother's brow and eyes.

"What's wrong, my son?" she asked quietly.

"Nothing, mother, nothing. Don't bother." He laughed slightly. "Maybe it's because I've got a rival."

His mother smiled.

"Oh, no, not with her"—he laughed again—"at least, not yet. A man beat me speaking this afternoon. He took me by surprise, but I'll be ready for him next time. Still, I'm not very well, and I can't go into the parlor to-night. Besides, I've got some writing to do. Tell them how sorry I am, won't you?" He rose from his seat, for he could hear the coming guests in the hall. "Good-night," he said; and he kissed her forehead as he passed behind her chair, but the shadow that was there stayed.

A little darky girl in a checked cotton dress lighted his way outside along a path of round-stone flagging. For the the house was built after the earliest colonial fashion, with an ell left and right—one of which, disconnected from the house and called the "office" in slavery days, had been Marshall's room since the day he

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started to town to school. It signified paternal trust; it meant independence. His room was ready. The student-lamp was lighted. On the table was a vase of flowers from his mother's garden, and he sat down close to their fragrance, and, with a conscious purpose of fulfilling his word, he did try for a while to write. But his hand shook, and he arose and opened a pantry door to one side of the fireplace, and called from the window for old Tom to bring him drinking-water. The glisten of glass-ware came through the crack of the pantry door, and the old negro gave it one sullen glance and went out without speaking. Marshall was walking up and down the room. Once he stopped at the mantel to look at the picture of a very young girl in white muslin and with a big Leghorn hat held lightly by one slender hand in her lap. Under it was a scrawling line, "To Rannie from Anne." He turned sharply away and sat down at his table again, with his forehead on his crossed arms. There had been no trouble, no doubt, between the two in those young days. Now there seemed to be nothing else; and it was in one of these wretched intervals of causeless misunderstanding that a hulking countryman had taught him his first bitter lesson in defeat while Anne looked on. They were having a good time in the parlor. Somebody was playing a waltz. There was a

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ripple of light laughter through the hall door, and some deep-voiced young fellow was talking low on the porch not far from his window. The sounds smote him with a sharp pain of remoteness from it all, and straightway a memory began to bridge the gap between him and those other days; so that he rose presently and took down the picture and put it on the table before him, looking at it steadily. In a little while he unlocked a drawer at his right hand, and took out a note-book and began with the beginning, slowly turning the leaves. It was filled with his own manuscript. Here and there was a verse, "To Anne." On every page, from every paragraph, the name sprang from the white paper—Anne! Anne! Anne! He had meant to burn that book; the impulse came now, as always; but now, as always, he went on turning the leaves. It ran back years—to the childhood of the girl. "Her father's brain, her mother's heart," ran one line, "but her beauty is her own." Some of the verse was almost good. It was Anne's brow here, her eyes there, her mouth, her hand, her arm; "that arm," he read, smiling faintly—"the little hollow midway from which the gracious, lovely lines start up and down. It would hold the rain a snowdrop might catch; dew enough for the bath—the ivory bath—of a humming-bird; enough nectar to make Cupid

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delirious, were he to use it for a drinking-cup. Looking for Psyche, the little god rests there, no doubt, while she sleeps. It he doesn't, he is blind, indeed."

Those were the days when he thought he might be a poet or a novelist if either were a manlier trade; if there were not always the more serious business of law and politics to which he was committed by inheritance. Still it was very foolish, the book, and with the impulse again to burn, he placed it back in the drawer and turned the key. Then he put the picture in its place, and sat down again, as though he would go on with his work, but, instead, reached suddenly across the table. The sound of old Tom's banjo was coming up through his back window from the lilacs below, and, as his fingers closed around the glass, the strum started up before him the old array of ever-weakening visions—the negro's reproachful look, the deepening shadows in his mother's face, the pain in Anne's clear eyes—and now a new one, the figure of the mountaineer, burly, vivid, and so menacing that he felt nerve, muscle, and brain get suddenly tense as though to meet some shock. And there was his hand trembling like an old man's under the green shade of the lamp. The sight smote him through with a fear of himself so sharp that he brushed his hands rapidly across his eyes,

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and with tightened lips once more took up his pen.

The moon looked in at his window radiantly when he pushed the curtains aside to close a shutter, so that he changed his mind about going to bed, and blew out his lamp and sat at the window, looking out. The young men were going home. He heard the laughing good-bys in the hall, and the low, laughing talk of the young fellows where they were unhitching their horses behind the shrubbery; then the soft beat of hoofs and wheels on the turf, the loud slam of the pike gate, and the wild rush of the young bucks racing each other home. There was a rustle in the hall, the closing of a door below, a shutter above, and the house was still.

Not a breath of air moved outside. The white aspens were quiet as the sombre, aged pines that had been brought over from old Hanover, in Virginia, and stood with proud solemnity befitting the honor. Across the meadow came the low bellow of a restless bull; nearer, the tinkle of a sheep-bell; and closer, the drowsy twitter of birds in the lilac-bushes at the garden gate. Beyond the lawn and the mock-orange hedge was the woodland, with its sinuous line of soft shadow against the sky, and the broken moonlight under its low branches. Primitive soil, that woodland; no plough had run a furrow through it; no white

man had called it his own before the boy's great forefather, asleep under the wrinkled pines. How full of peace it was—how still!

Over in the other ell, his mother had gone to sleep with the last prayer on her lips, the last thought in her heart, for him. She had taken him with her into dreamland, no doubt. She was affected, his mother, so a teasing old aunt had told him—and her; but never in his life could he remember her perfect poise of body and soul to waver, her sweet dignity to unbend. Proud, but very gentle, her face was—he knew but one other like it. “To be your father's wife and your mother, my son,” he had heard her, in simple faith, once say. That was her mission on earth. And what a mission he was making for that gracious life!

In the dark parlor, just through the wall of his room, were Jouett portraits of his kinspeople—of the great Marshall, whose great day people said he was to bring back. Next him was that Marshall's youngest son, a proud-looking young fellow with a noble face and a quiet smile, who had died early, and who, the old aunt said, was the more brilliant of the two. Rannie was like that great-uncle, she used often to say. And he, Marshall knew, had quietly and with beautiful dignity drunk himself to death for a woman. Men could do that in his day. Men had—the

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young fellow rose, shivering from another reason than the cooling night air; it still was possible.

Over the quiet fields of blue-grass and young wheat and blossoming clover, in the capital, Boone Stallard was looking from his window on the prison, white in the moonlight as a sepulchre, and on the bleak cliff rising behind it; and his last thoughts, too, were on his home and his people; the old two-roomed log cabin with its long porch and long slanting roof, Black Mountain rising in a sheer wall of green behind it, and a little creek tinkling under laurel and rhododendron into the Cumberland; his mother, gaunt, aged, in brown homespun, with her pipe, in a corner of the fireplace; opposite, his sister—whose husband had been killed in the feud—with a worn, pallid face and dull eyes; his half-brother, cleaning his Winchester, no doubt; the children in bed; the talk of the feud, always the feud. They were all Stallards on that creek, just as in the next bend of the river all were Keatons—their hereditary enemies. They were “a high-heeled and over-bearin’ race,” the Stallards were; and they were hated and fought, and they hated and fought back, with the end not yet come. All his life, Boone Stallard had known only hardship, work, self-denial. There was no love of sloth, no vice of blood, to stunt his

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growth; as yet, no love of woman to confuse his purpose, nor inspire it.

Not once did the two currents cross but on the thinkers themselves; on nothing else—not even on Anne.

IV

A WEEK later the Mansion was thrown open, for the third time during the session, to the law-makers and their wives. Stallard, Colton said, must go; and Colton's word, now, was to the good-natured mountaineer little short of law.

He had found an unknown ally when he opened the great Kentucky daily on the morning after his first fight. There was a long account of the debate, a strong tribute to "The Cumberland Cyclone," as Colton, the correspondent, called him, and an editorial on the question that bore the distinctive ear-marks of the great man in charge. That same morning, when the question of disruption came up, a member who had considerable aspiration, some foresight, and no principles to make or mar his future, and who knew he would help himself in another section and not harm himself in his own, rose and took sides with Stallard, emphasizing the editor's emphasis of Stallard's idea that the mountain people must some day govern themselves, and, therefore, would be better let alone now. To the sur-

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prise of all, Marshall rose and stated frankly the lack of positive knowledge on which he had spoken the day before. While he must hold to certain opinions expressed, he recognized the possibility of having done the mountain people wrong in certain statements made; that time would soon prove.

Meanwhile, he would withdraw his motion, with the consent of the House, and counsel further forbearance on the part of the State. It was graceful, magnanimous, gallant; but Colton, watching the mountaineer's face, saw not a muscle of it move. Marshall's bill was put aside for the time. The mountain members, headed by Jack Mockaby, drew close to Stallard, and, before noon of his second day at the capital, Stallard found himself a man of mark, and with a following that in all legislative questions could exact consideration. And for the hour of that noon his head swam and got steady again; for his brain was as sane as his purpose was firm. Of his gift of oratory, he took as little thought as a bird takes of its gift of song. He neither drank nor gambled, and as he kept aloof from all social affairs, he wasted neither his energy nor his time. Few committees of importance were appointed upon which he did not have a place, and his capacity for work was prodigious. In Colton he came at once to know his best friend,

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and every few days he saw his name prominent in the reports of legislative doings. These would slowly make their way home to the mountains, and Stallard knew his seat was secure for another term unless the feud intervened. Once even, in the first flush of his success, the dome of the big Capitol floated a little while along the horizon of his heated vision, and sank. For Stallard's second thought and his last were ever for his people; and he watched their welfare with an eye that let no measure escape that might be of possible help to them. Thus far he had given no thought to anything but work, and now Colton said that, out of respect to the Governor who had been kind to him, Stallard must go to the Mansion. So he had dressed himself in his best—which was quite bad—had walked twice past the brilliantly lighted old house, and in hopeless indecision had started, for the second time, home. Inside, Anne sat in a corner of the big square drawing-room, watching the late-coming guests. Colton was on the sofa beside her and Marshall stood just to one side. The two men did not like each other, and for that reason Colton rattled on in his talk recklessly. The receiving-line of young women in white was broken, and the rather chill formality of the occasion dissolved. Occasionally some little woman, tripping past, would ask, naively, "Oh, you haven't

met my husband? ” And off she would go for the embryonic statesman. Dress and manners made Anne shudder now and then, but no sign arose above the fine courtesy that made social democracy in her own home absolute; and, unfailingly, she presented Marshall, who bowed with perfect gravity to the absurd little ducks and curtsseys made him. Colton, who knew everybody, was giving pen-and-ink sketches right and left.

They were all there—from the Peavine to the Purchase, through blue-grass, bear-grass, and pennyroyal; from Mammoth Cave and Gethsemane, the Knobs and the Benson Hills; from aristocratic Fayette and Bourbon, “sweet Owen” fortress of democracy, to border Harlan, hot-bed of the feud; from the Mississippi to Hell-fer-Sartain Creek in bloody Breathitt. Those were the contrasting soils, social sections, and divisions of vegetation on which the devil was said to have slyly put a thumb of reservation when he offered the earth to his great Conqueror (“and sometimes,” said Colton, “I think the reservation was granted”). All this the magic name of old Kentucky meant to her loyal sons, who are to this country what the Irishman is to the world; and who, no matter where cast, remain what they were born—Kentuckians—to the end. The Virginia cavalier was there, he went on, with a

side-glance at Marshall; the Scotch-Irishman, who had taken on the cavalier's polish and lost nothing of his own strength; the "pore white trash"—now risen in the world; the kinless non-descript—himself, for instance; the political grandee of the cross-roads—he of the Clay manner and the Websterian brow across the room. He always made afternoon calls in his dress suit. There was Jack Mockaby from Breathitt, who was expecting arrest each day last year for a little feud of his own, while he was in the House making laws for the rest of the State. The gaunt individual at the door was another mountaineer. He had brought his wife with him to the "settlements." Once she had been asked if she were going to the theatre. She "'lowed she was, but she didn't aim to take part." And she did go, and she took down her hair before the curtain went up, gave it a little brush or two, and slowly rolled it up in a knot at the back of her head. On a fishing trip, Colton had taken dinner with one of his member's constituents. They had corn-bread and potatoes.

"Take out, stranger," said the mountaineer. "Hev a tater; take two of 'em; take damn nigh all of 'em."

Oh, they were a strange people, these mountaineers—proud, hospitable, good-hearted, and murderous! Religious, too: they talked chiefly

of homicide and the Bible. He knew of an awful fight that came up over a discussion on original sin. Yes, they were queer; but there was one—Boone Stallard was his name—Miss Anne had heard him speak? Colton thought he could make something of him.

“They call him the ‘Cumberland Cyclone’ now: that’s mine, that phrase. Pretty good, isn’t it? They will run him against Marshall for Speaker next year,” he added, with innocent malice; “mark my words. He’s a coming man—but he doesn’t seem to be coming here very fast. He said he would. If he doesn’t show up in five minutes, I’m going after him. It’ll be his début, and I’m his chaperon. Ah——”

The information was not worth while. Though smilingly interested in Colton’s light nonsense, she was glancing now and then at the door, where her father was receiving the last stragglers; and, looking at her, Marshall knew when she saw the mountaineer, and he smiled: her interest amused him. Stallard’s big form was in the doorway. His eyes were roving helplessly up and down the room, and his face, despite its gravity, wore so pained a look that the girl herself half rose. But the Governor had stepped forward and, holding the new-comer’s arm, was leading him across the room toward her.

“Anne, I want to present Mr. Stallard to you

—Mr. Boone Stallard. Mr. Marshall, Mr. Stallard—you two should know each other; and Mr. Colton you know, of course.”

The girl put out her hand. Marshall, with punctilious courtesy, was putting out his when he met Stallard's eye. The mountaineer knew no polite law that bade him, feeling one way, to act another; and what he felt, he made plain. Marshall straightened like steel. It was a declaration of war, open, mutual; and Colton, with a quick breath, half rose from his seat. The Governor, turning away, saw nothing, and Anne's eyes were lowered suddenly to the white point of one of her slippers.

“Pardon,” said Marshall, with quick tact; “your father is calling me.” And he bowed himself away and toward the Governor, who was passing through the door.

Colton turned to Anne's friend, Katherine Craig, who sat at his right, and whose eyes had lost nothing. Stallard crossed his big hands awkwardly in front of him, and stood with one foot advanced and the knee bent. He wore a great Prince Albert coat, which was longer in front than behind, and high boots which showed to their tops under his trousers. They were carefully blackened, and the feet were large—so was the man. Anne saw all these details before she raised her eyes to his, and then for a while she

quite forgot them. They were calm, open eyes that she saw, quite dark but luminous, and they quietly held hers in a way that made her wonder then whether it might not be hard for some woman, against his will, to turn her own aside. Yet they were timid too, and kindly, while the strong mouth was for the moment hard; it still held the antagonism that elsewhere in the rugged face was gone.

"I heard your speech," she said, friendlily. "I want to congratulate you. You gave us all a surprise—especially Mr. Marshall."

"Well, I am very glad you liked it," he said, slowly and with great care, almost as if he were speaking another tongue. "I don't recollect that I saw you there. I reckon I didn't look around at the gallery."

"No," she said, with a smile; "you were not very gallant."

She was sorry when the words left her mouth, the big man looked so helpless. But no woman minds if the strong are shy, and she went on a little blindly: "Now Mr. Marshall paid us a pretty compliment." If she were uncertain as to the little start he gave when she mentioned Marshall's name just before, she was not now. The repression at his lips spread to his eyes, his brow, and his nostrils, and he did not look pleasant. She did not know why she should

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press the point further, but the impulse was irresistible.

"Mr. Marshall is a great friend of mine," she added, her self-control fluttering, and she raised her eyes to see what should come into his, and she was frightened. She knew little of the strict ethics that governed his life in the matter of friendship; if Marshall was her friend, then she was the mountaineer's enemy; but with a flash she caught the thought in his mind and, with it, too, his suspicion that she had meant to make the fact of her friendship for Marshall plain.

"I hope you two will like each other," she added, quickly, and with a vague purpose of somehow putting herself to rights; but the mountaineer stared merely.

"I don't think we will," he said, bluntly. Again Anne's eyes went for refuge back to the point of her slipper, and luckily for both, just then, the Governor came to take Stallard away. Colton and Katherine turned.

"How did you get along?" asked Colton. Anne laughed. Her cheeks were a bright red, and Colton began to wonder.

"Not very well. It was dreadful. He's half a savage. He made me afraid."

Marshall was coming up behind her, and could not help but hear what pleases no lover—fear in a woman of another man. His manner was light

and spirited, and he laughed in a way that made her look sharply up.

"Good-night." His face was flushed, and Anne's hardened a little while she looked after him. Stallard did not come to bid her good-night, and she guessed the truth—that he did not know it was necessary. Still he should have wanted to come, she thought, imperiously; and she did not guess the truth of that—that, much puzzled, he had wanted to come; that he had passed the rear door to look at her, and had stood a long while, staring at her strangely; that he had hesitated, through sheer fear, to speak to her again, and, vaguely distressed, had slipped away without a word to anybody.

For a long while, after the guests were gone, she sat thinking under the pink drop-light in her father's study. It had been the same thing over and over for so long with Marshall—peace, a foolish quarrel, the wine-room and the card-table; some wild deed, contrition, pardon, and peace again. It was the beginning of the second stage now, and she looked a little bitter, and then she sighed helplessly, as though she would as well make ready now to forgive him again. When she thought of Stallard, she found herself going back again to Marshall's graduating-day. That was odd, but the fact slipped unnoticed through her consciousness, for she was wishing that Mar-

shall had the strength that she believed was the mountaineer's. What might he not do then? Then, perhaps, everything might be otherwise. And thinking of the mountaineer again, there came again, out of the past, the hot air of the old university hall; and now, as then, she was walking out on the big portico to escape it. That day she had dropped her parasol down the great flight of stone steps. A rough-looking country boy was leaning against one of the big pillars, staring at her. She waited for him to pick it up, but he never took his eyes from her face, and she got it herself. She had thought him stupid and impolite, and she never knew what fixed the incident in her mind, unless it was the boy's intent stare and his shock of black hair. Even now her memory of the incident had no significance, for she was busy thinking how absurd the contrast was between the mountaineer's face and his dress, and wondering why it was that, once, some look in the man's eyes should have given her such a pang of pity for him. He must have miserably misunderstood her that night, and no wonder; she must make that right, and quickly.

"Papa," she said, "is there any reason why I shouldn't ask that Mr.—Boone—Stallard"—she pronounced the name slowly—"to dinner?"

"Why, no, Anne; why not?"

"Oh, nothing. I didn't know. He's so queer.

He's so diffident—it's absurd in such a big man—and then he isn't. I wonder that he came to-night."

"It was Colton's doing, I imagine," said the Governor, rising to fill his pipe; "and then I suppose he thought he owed especial courtesy to me. I let out a pretty bad convict on parole not long ago, at his request—a mountaineer."

"Who is he?" she asked, so absent-mindedly that the Governor turned.

"Who is who?" he answered, smiling; and then, "Why, you remember, surely. Marshall introduced a bill to abolish his county the other day. He belongs to one of the factions that are making trouble in the mountains. I suppose one-fourth of the people in his county have the name of Stallard. And they are worse about stretching kinship down there than we are."

The girl rose to go to her room, and the Governor called to her again, and she stopped under the light of the stairway, with her dreaming face uplifted, the hem of her gown raised from one arched foot, and one white hand on the banister—and nobody there to see!

"By the way, can't you make use of a trusty for a day or two in the garden? I'll send you a feudsman, if you are getting interested in the mountaineers. I made still another trusty not long ago, at the warden's request. The moun-

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taineers can't stand confinement, he says, having lived all their lives in the open air. Can you give one something to do? "

Anne's lips parted and her eyes closed sleepily. " Yes," she said.

V

A FORTNIGHT later, Anne sat in the shade of her grape-arbor, directing the leisurely labor of the "trusty" who had come over from the gloomy prison whose high gray walls and peaked roof, with its ceaseless column of black smoke, were visible over the houses that sat between.

Her dinner had taken place a few nights before. Stallard was not only not there—he had not even answered her note of invitation. Colton laughed when she told him. He could not explain it, but he knew why the mountaineer had probably not come. Stallard had been hard at work; he was not merely an orator; he shirked no work, and he read law steadily. He had not answered, perhaps, because he did not know the social need of an answer. He might have turned up at the dinner without having sent his acceptance; that was as likely as what he had done. It was all doubtless true, and the girl wanted to believe that it was. Still, it was the harder to believe for the reason that it was altogether of a piece with the usual way of a man who seemed

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to swerve aside for nothing, and who bore himself toward her as she had all her life borne herself toward all men. And young as she was, Anne's reign had been a long one. Even as a school-girl she had her little local court of sweet-hearts, which widened rapidly, as she grew older, through the county, through several counties, through even the confines of the State. It was a social condition already passing away; the pretty young queen and the manly young fellows doing her honor with such loyalty — openly, frankly her slaves—to themselves, to one another, and to the world; declaring love one after another in turn, leaving her with a passionate resolution to throw off the yoke, and bending meekly to it again. For usually she kept the lover the friend even after as lover he was hopeless, if the lover ever is. Occasionally, however, some young fellow, a little fiercer than usual, would stalk away through the hall, bang the door a little more loudly, and really come back no more. Then Anne would go to her room and cry half the night through, to learn soon that he had gone elsewhere for solace, and that her place was filled. Soon she could smile when some young heart went broken from her to mend no more; and, thereafter, she cried sometimes only because she was losing a friend. By and by some of her courtiers married, some went other ways,

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but of the original court a few were still left, and of them Marshall was one. He was the oldest, the most faithful and untiring. His strength, aside from birth, was in oratory and politics, for which the girl, coming from a race of lawyers and statesmen, had an innate predilection; so that, in spite of his wild ways, general expectation, which looks to the untiring to win in love, as in everything else, rested on Marshall. Still he had not won, and Anne kept on her placid, queenly way, holding every man her friend because she was fair with all and loved no one less than his rival. What the trouble was, nobody knew precisely—not Marshall—not even Anne. Once her mother, remembering the boy's inheritance, had given her gentle warning against intrusting herself to him; and his reckless way of life kept the warning always in mind. Always, perhaps, Marshall's perfect loyalty had kept her from knowing how strong her own feeling was for him. And then, as she grew older, she slowly came to exact, what few women do, that a man shall be making an honest effort to realize the best that is in him. That Marshall, brilliant and winning as he was, had never done. It was the contrast in this one particular that was helping arouse her interest in the mountaineer. One look in his face, and doubt on that question, as to Stallard, was at rest. Moreover, she had a swift,

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sympathetic insight into what was best in the humanity around her, and this told her that in this rugged rustic was more hidden power than she had ever found in any one man. He was the first man with whom it had been necessary for her to be the first to hold out her hand, in simple kindness at the start, and then for the mere self-acknowledged reason that he was the first to reach her intellect, as somebody might some day reach her heart. Necessarily, it was the first time she had met with no response. To say that she was piqued would be absurd; to say that her interest was not deepened would be to say that she was not a woman and not human. She had thought of the man a good deal; she would tell anybody that. She wanted to know of him, and Colton had told her much, and everything was of interest. She knew nothing of the mountains, nothing of the people who lived in them. Since she had lived at the Capitol, she had watched the raftsmen coming down the river; once, she had seen a crowd of dusty, wild-looking men empty from the train under charge of an officer, and she had been told that they were moonshiners; that was all. No more did she know of the highlands of the east, and no more of the people who sprang from them. But Colton—the subject was getting to be a hobby with him—had told her all he knew and much more. Her personal

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interest in Stallard helped her interest in his people. He was the first mountaineer she had seen close at hand. The second was in her garden before her, and she had no way of knowing that both were exceptional. The convict was young and rather good-looking. He had a mat of close-cut black hair and a swarthy face. His eyes were dark, bright, open, and frankly curious. The face was almost good, except for the small, loose, beautiful mouth, which, with all its easy good-humor, showed to a close study as sensual and rather cruel. She had hesitated at first about giving him orders.

"Ah, what is your name, please?"

"Buck," he said, without looking at her.

"Buck what?"

"Buck's enough, hain't it?" he said, a little surlily.

"Yes," she said, quietly. "I want you to go on that side and hoe around those rose-bushes there."

The young fellow went to work without a word. The trusties earn their liberty at a sacrifice of the good opinion of their fellow-prisoners; but the young mountaineer was sick for the open air; moreover, he was doing a woman's work under a woman's supervision; and he was not pleased. He worked very well, but he seemed weak. His cheeks soon took on a high color; he

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breathed hard, and he looked feverish. The stripes must be hot and suffocating, Anne thought on a sudden, and she spoke to him again very kindly.

"You must stop awhile now; the sun is too hot. Sit down there and rest."

The convict sat down readily enough. Anne turned away to look across the street and nod to a passing friend, and, when she turned back, he was looking with boyish directness straight at her.

"Hit's Buck Stallard."

The girl started. Then it dawned that the abrupt giving of his name was an apology, and she smiled.

"You come from Roland County?"

The boy nodded. "Yes," he said.

"That's where all the trouble is going on?"

"Yes." She wondered why he didn't say, "Yes, ma'am." "That's what I'm doin' over thar," he went on, with a jerk of his thumb toward the prison. "Thar's two of us in thar, an' I reckon thar'll be more, ef the boys at home don't watch out."

Most of the prisoners would say they were in for fighting, for manslaughter even, rather than confess to theft or some other petty crime—a curious commentary on the public sentiment within and without the sombre walls. Anne knew

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that, but she had little doubt that in this case the convict was telling the truth, and she was inured to the point where she did not shrink.

“ Ever heerd o’ Boone Stallard? ”

The question took her off guard, and the next moment she felt herself coloring under the boy’s keen look.

“ Yes,” she said, calmly; “ I heard him make a speech the other day.”

“ Did ye? ” he asked, smiling. “ Thar hain’t nobody as can down Boone on language. Me an’ Boone’s kin,” he said, a little proudly, but he was watching her closely and feeling his way with care. “ We’s all kin down thar.”

That was what her father had said, and she herself knew what it was to have many kinspeople, and a few of whom she was not proud.

“ Has he ever taken part in the feud? ” she asked; and again the boy eyed her cautiously.

“ Naw,” he said, frankly, satisfied with his inspection. “ Boone’s al’ays a-tryin’ to git us fellers to quit. Boone’s fer law an’ order ever’ time, Boone is. Thar hain’t nobody down thar like Boone. He ain’t afeerd nother. Ever’body knows that. He’s plum’ crazy ’bout the sanctaty of the law an’ his dooty—that’s somep’n he picked up from you furriners when he was out in the settlemint, I reckon. He’ll git into it some o’ these days now, you see; fer he’ll go ef

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he thinks he ought to. An' then thar'll be Billy-hell to pay. You see!"

Again the girl started, but the boy was looking away in complete innocence of giving offence, absorbed no doubt in picturing just what would happen should Boone Stallard some day take part. She remembered, too, that Colton said the mountaineers still talked even before their women with Anglo-Saxon freedom, and that their oaths were little more to them than slang was to the outside world.

"Boone's about the only Stallard as hain't in it; and Stallards air as thick down thar as red-heads in a deadenin'."

"As *what!*"

"Red-heads—woodpeckers—in a deadenin'—a place whar folks have cut the bark off o' trees to kill 'em. The red-heads goes thar 'cause hit's easier fer 'em to peck holes in dead trees. Sometimes I think you furriners knows most ever'thing, an' ag'in you don't seem to know much." Anne came near laughing aloud. Here was a character.

"What makes you fight that way?"

The boy laughed. "Well, suppose some sorry feller was to shoot your brother or your daddy, an' the high-sheriff was afeerd o' him an' wouldn't arrest him, whut would you do? You know mighty well. You'd just go git yo' gun

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an' let him have it. That's what. Then mebbe his brother would layway you; an' all yo' folks 'ud git mad an' take hit up; an' things 'ud git frolicsome ginerally. Whut's yo' name?"

The girl had to answer, the question was asked with such frank trust. "Anne Bruce."

The boy repeated the name mechanically, and then looked at the work he had done. "Whut you want to raise so many flowers fer, Anne? Whyn't you put that ground in corn?"

The girl reddened in spite of her amusement. "You must call me Miss Anne or Miss Bruce," she said, quietly.

"Miz Anne," repeated the boy. "Who ever heerd o' sech a thing?" He would have laughed had not her face been so serious. "All right," he said, placidly. "But we don't call no woman 'Miz' whar I come from 'ceptin' they's purty ole or is married. You ain't ole enough, I know; an' you ain't married, is ye?"

Anne flushed slightly, but there was not a trace of impudence in his tone, and she could not bring herself to rebuke his childlike curiosity. "No, I'm not married," she said, simply.

But the boy saw something was wrong, and with a look of sudden ill-humor rose to his work. His depression was momentary; he seemed to have the light-hearted irresponsibility of the insane. Already he was humming to himself in a

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mournful minor; it was something about "wild roses"; the intervals were strange to her ear, and the tune seemed to move through at least three keys. Anne remembered the folk songs that Colton said the mountaineers still sang:

"To jump in the river and drown"—

that was the last sorrowful line; and then he veered to something lively, singing words that she could barely hear:

"Chickens a-crowin' on Sourwood Mountain,
Heh-o-dee-um-dee-eedle-dahdy-dee!
Git yo' dogs an' we'll go huntin',
Heh-o-dee-um-dee-eedle-dahdy-dee!"

It had the ducky's rhythm and the ducky's way of dropping into the minor on the third line, while the swing of the last was like the far-away winding of a horn, and it was to ring in her ears for years to come. He was changing now, and she smiled. Colton had sung that to her; he called it "The Dying Injunction of Johnnie Buck."

"Oh, Johnnie Buck is dead,
An' the last words he said
Was, never let yo' woman have her way."

There was but one verse, and he sang it over and over while she watched him, trying to realize, to understand, what Colton said; that in this

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age, this day, this hour; in her own land, her own State, and within the two days' gallop of a thoroughbred of her own home, were people living like the pioneers, singing folk-songs centuries old, talking the speech of Chaucer, and loving, hating, fighting, and dying like the clans of Scotland. It was very strange and interesting, and for no reason she sighed deeply. The town clock was striking noon.

"You'd better go to dinner now," she said, "and come back this afternoon."

"This whut?" The mountaineer's day has no afternoon.

"This evening."

"Aw!" Again the boy laughed frankly. Just then the Governor was passing into the Mansion. "Who is that ole feller?"

"You mustn't say 'old fellow.' You must say 'old gentleman.' That's my father."

"Well, I be durned! Can he pardin me out?"

"Yes, he could, if there were a good reason."

The convict was looking intently at the Governor as he passed through the door. His face had grown sullen and there was a new fire in his eyes.

"An' I never knowed it till yestiddy," he muttered; "an' my time 'most done. Hit ain't right," he said, fiercely.

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For the moment he forgot the girl, and he wheeled quickly to her with a sudden fear that he had uncovered himself to a possible enemy, and bent his sharp black eyes full on her. She was puzzled by the change in his face, but she gave him a kindly nod and turned toward the house.

Boone Stallard was passing the gate, as he always did at that hour, going to his dinner. The young trusty called him by his first name and Stallard stopped, but the two did not shake hands. The mountaineer spoke to Anne without raising his hat.

VI

FOR the time, peace down in the mountains took away the cause of war between Marshall and Stallard at the capital, but hardly a question came up in the House but the tendency was plain in both men to take opposing sides; and always the personal note of enmity was frankly dominant. In consequence, Anne looked forward with some anxiety to the night of her dinner—the dinner to which Stallard had promised to come. He was deeply mortified, Colton told her, over his failure to answer her note; so to show that she forgave him, she had asked him again. She feared nothing openly disagreeable; Marshall would not suffer himself, under her roof, to be drawn into that: still, the mountaineer's blunt hostility might keep her continually on guard and put the table under unpleasant restraint; for the feeling between the two men was public talk, as her interest in the mountaineer was getting to be.

To Marshall, then, she gave the seat of honor. Colton sat on her left. Stallard she placed at her father's right, and next Katherine Craig.

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A rather talkative newspaper man, a meteor from the North whom Colton had caught while he was still blazing, and who, for Colton's sake, was there, sat midway. Anne could not reckon as to him, being an unknown quantity, and she little dreamed that he was to be the dangerous link of communication which she found necessary to sever with a tactful stroke. He was making a trip through the South to get a comprehensive grasp of the negro question; and, incidentally, to turn a search-light on the origin and condition of the poor whites. That was, in effect, what she heard him tell the Episcopal minister as they were rising to go out to dinner. Now the clergyman, who sat opposite him, was resuming the subject.

"How long shall you stay?" he asked.

"Oh, about six weeks, I suppose," was the careless answer.

"Stay as long as I have," said the minister, with a pleasant smile, "and perhaps you won't write anything."

The journalist realized that he was talking to a Northern man, and his face lighted up.

"Why, how long have you been South?"

"Six years," was the dry answer, and Anne smiled.

Throughout the meal she watched the mountaineer closely. His face was placid and grave,

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but his eyes were busy. Nothing escaped them. He did nothing that he did not see done first; and she saw him waiting more than once to learn what it was proper to do. It was plain that he would get along; indeed, he had got along. That she noticed when he entered the drawing-room; and now Colton, with the kindest humor, was calling her attention to the fact, while Marshall was engaged with his right-hand neighbor.

"I've been tempering the cyclone to the shorn lamb of conventionality," he said. "I've got him down out of the clouds now, and he roars gently. I've got his hair cut; and did you observe his patent-leathers? I tied that four-in-hand. He had a ready-made bow of yellow satin. I'll get him out of that Prince Albert pretty soon."

"He surely has improved. How did you manage it so quickly?"

The question was mechanical. She knew Colton as one of the few who can give advice without offence to anybody; but she was watching the Northern journalist, who was vigorously haranguing Reynolds of the geological corps. Several times she saw his lips frame the word "mountaineer."

"Oh, he was easy work. He went to the university at Lexington. But he's been down in the mountains so long since then that he has lapsed

into original sin. That's easy, Reynolds says, down there."

Marshall turned just then, and Colton took up the pink maiden on his left. Stallard was not talking much. Most of the time he was shyly listening to Katherine, who was doing her best to engage him, or to the Governor; but now and then he would turn his eyes toward Anne, and she was pleased. Once she gave him a friendly smile and, from his sudden color, she knew that his looking had been unconscious, and that, too, pleased her. The talking was so spirited all round the table that there seemed to be no possible occasion for the two men to come into contact. She began to wonder how she could have feared it: it was hardly possible at the table, and only by accident could they clash in the drawing-room; and then she was quite sure that Colton had warned the mountaineer on this point as well. It was just while she was giving a long sigh of relief that one of those curious lulls came that are said to silence a table of people either twenty minutes before or twenty minutes after the clock strikes an hour. Anne gave a low, nervous laugh that made Colton turn quickly toward her. The meteor was sputtering through the sudden quiet.

"No," he said, with emphasis. "The accepted theory of the origin of the mountaineer, particularly of the Kentucky mountaineer, is that

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he is the descendant——” He had got that far when he became conscious of the intense silence, that everybody was listening, and that Stallard’s calm eyes were on him. Anne was trembling when, to her relief, the mountaineer smiled. He had learned a great deal. “—— of exported paupers and convicts, indents, and ‘pore white trash,’ ” he said, quietly and quite impersonally. “I don’t wonder that the theory has got abroad, because so little is known of the mountaineer and the effect of his environment, but I think—— ”

“Allow me,” said Reynolds, opposite, who was sunbrowned and wore spectacles. “That is a very foolish theory. Some of them are the descendants of those people, of course. There are more of them in the mountains than in the blue-grass, naturally; but the chief differences between them and us come from the fact that they have been shut off from the world absolutely for more than a hundred years. Take out the cavalier element, and, in rank and file, we were originally the same people. Until a man has lived a year at a time in the mountains he doesn’t know what a thin veneer civilization is. It goes on and off like a glove, especially off. Put twenty *average* blue-grass families down in the mountains half a dozen miles from one another, take away their books, keep them there, with no schools and no churches, for a hundred years,

and they will be as ignorant and lawless as the mountaineer"—with a nod of "saving your presence" to Stallard—"and, with similar causes, fighting one another just the same."

It was a bold speech, but nobody there had the better right to make it, for none there was of better blood. The pure gratitude in Stallard's face was pathetic. Marshall had grown grave, and Anne saw a paleness about his lips.

"You mustn't say a word," she said, seriously, but she spoke too late.

"Would we be assassinating one another from ambush, too?" he asked, with his lids lowered and quietly, but in a way that made Stallard lay down his fork, drop his hands into his lap, and wait.

A look from Anne stopped Reynolds's answer. "You mustn't go any further now," she said, laughingly, "or I'll have to take part; and I don't know whose part I should take. My great-great-great-grandmother lived in a log cabin—didn't she, papa?—and did her own cooking. They went back into the mountains for a while, when game got scarce in the blue-grass. Suppose they had stayed. I might be a mountaineer myself, and be in a feud. Dear me, somebody might be calling me 'pore white trash!'"

The light manner of the girl was serious enough to comfort Stallard unspeakably. It

held Marshall back with a humor that had no sting for him. Reynolds was smiling; Colton, dissolved in quiet wonder.

The meteor, after flickering once or twice like a dying tallow dip, had encountered a dangerous light in Stallard's eye and had quite gone out. The storm-cloud was gone, and the men were left to their cigars. Stallard did not smoke, and the Governor took him to the library, across the hall. Two State senators had Marshall between them over an axe they wanted the lower house to grind. The journalist and the clergyman had drawn together, and Reynolds had Colton and two others at the end of the table, and was telling a story. Anne sat near the folding-doors, which were slightly ajar, and, as the ladies opposite were on some domestic theme and taking in her presence only now and then with a glance, she could not help hearing; and after the first words she frankly listened.

"Maybe you can use it, Colton," Reynolds was saying. "You remember I was captain of the football club at the university? Well, one day, at the beginning of the season, one of the fellows got hurt, and I had to take a green substitute. There were only some Bible students out there looking on—the fellows, you know, who dye their linen dusters for overcoats in winter—and one of them stepped out. 'I don't

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know the game, pardner,' he said, 'but I reckon I can tote that ball wherever you wants me.' It was funny to hear him drawl it out; but he was a big chap, and I took him. The ball did come to him presently, and he got it off the ground. 'Whar'd ye say take it?' he asked, holding it above his head, while two little fellows on the other side were jumping up after it like dogs for a piece of bread. 'Run for the goal!' I yelled. 'Whut, them stakes?' he drawled. 'Yes, you fool, run!' He gave me one look as much as to say, 'Well, I'll attend to you presently'; and then he started, with the ball in one hand and knocking men right and left with the other, just as though they were tenpins, and everybody yelling, 'foul.' He never stopped. One man was on his back and two were swinging to his waist, when he was within ten feet of the goal. He thought he had to go *under* it, and he staggered those ten feet sidewise and, with the crowd on him, got through. 'Is that the game, pardner?' he asked, when the boys let him up. 'Well, I reckon I can do that all day. Hit's purty hard on a feller's clothes, though.' And we could never get him to play again. He said he hadn't the time, but I believe it was his clothes (we didn't have football suits in those days). He came around to see me about calling him a fool, and I wasn't long apologizing, either. Well,

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that fellow came over into the College of Arts and turned out a remarkable orator. He actually made his speech at Commencement from a slip of notes in his hand."

Colton was nodding his head. "I remember," he said.

"Well, Colton, that fellow was your cyclone. That was why I stood up for him."

Anne heard Colton's exclamation of surprise, and then no more; but she had been busy with memories, too, and a mystery was clearing. Once more it was Marshall's Commencement day. Again she felt the stifling heat and saw the portico, her parasol on the flight of steps, and the boy against one of the big pillars, with his fixed stare and his head of unruly black hair. The incident came vividly back while Reynolds was telling the story, and she looked at Stallard closely when the men came back into the drawing-room. It was quite possible; she would learn if he were the same. It was an odd cast of fate if he were.

Marshall went at once to the piano to select a song for her. He could both sing and play, but he would rarely do either. Music and art, for men, at least, are yet in serious disfavor through the South, and it is not wise for a man, with the serious purpose of law or politics before him, to show facility in light accomplishments. When Anne sang, Stallard's eyes never



Marshall went at once to the piano.

left her face. He was leaning against a column at the entrance to the dining-room, with his hands behind him, his shoulders fallen forward, his head sunk back, his lips slightly apart—and once more Anne saw the young rustic against the pillar, and met his curious look again. Only, when she smiled now, there was in his eyes something new, personal, eager, softened, and, on a sudden, a surprised flash of such unreckoning intensity that she faltered in her song, and did not look toward him again. The guests rose to go soon after she was done, but Stallard stood where he was; and when Colton called him by name and he turned, his eyes looked as though he had been suddenly awakened from sleep. The two passed Marshall on their way to Anne, but Stallard seemed not even to see him. He was still looking at Anne, who gave him a friendly, half-frightened smile, and passed him on with Colton. Marshall stayed behind. The mountaineer could hardly find his hat in the hallway and, as he started out, he turned again as though he would go back into the parlor. He seemed dazed.

“I believe——” he said, hesitatingly, and Colton, wondering what the matter was and fearing that he might do some breach of propriety, took him by the arm and led him out the door and into the starlight.

VII

THE next week Stallard disappeared altogether. Marshall, too, was rarely in evidence, through a fixed principle of his. One of Anne's suitors had come in from another part of the State, and Marshall, after showing the stranger every possible courtesy, as was his custom with his rivals, hospitably left the field. After the following Sunday, the stranger was gone the way of so many strangers before him, and Marshall smiled and resumed his visits to the Mansion. But Stallard stayed on in hiding. He came once to pay his dinner call, but that was plainly Colton's doing; several others were there, and Anne said nothing to the mountaineer alone. She had asked him to come again, and he had not come. Colton said he was hard at work, Katherine thought him shy, and Anne regretted that she had not been more friendly.

Several times the young trusty had been over to hoe in the garden. Anne made many efforts to find his conscience, to implant therein a seed of regeneration, but she soon gave him up as hopeless. She was astonished by his knowledge

of the Scriptures—for sometimes the mountaineer knows the great book from cover to cover—and by the distant application of them to his personal life. He had “heerd all that afore,” he said, with some superiority. “He had wrastled with the Sperit, an’ he *couldn’t* ‘come through.’ He was jus’ a-snortin’ fer conviction, he was.” Once she asked him why they did not settle their quarrels down in the mountains with their fists instead of with knives and pistols—as though her own people did that.

“All right,” he said. “S’posin’ a feller does somep’n to you. You go fer him fist an’ skull, gougin’ and bitin’. You gits whooped!” he concluded, triumphantly.

“Well,” she said, “that isn’t a disgrace.”

“All right. Then s’posin’, the next time he sees ye, he crows over ye. What you goin’ to do *then?*”

The problem, aside from religion, which had to be laid aside, was insoluble. The boy was an interesting puzzle to her. He was so frank a heathen. His wickedness was such a thing of impulse and odd reasoning. His curiosity was so absurdly childlike, so removed from impertinence. He never made a word of thanks for the little things she gave him, and yet she saw that he was not unappreciative. He repressed his frankness of speech a good deal, and he showed

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his consideration in other little ways. A quicker native intelligence she had never seen. His nature was alert, foxlike, elusive; and his sense of humor was a strange thing. He was constantly picking up little differences between her life and speech and his at home. He heard somebody call "pants" trousers, for instance, and over that he had a fit of derisive laughter. Indeed, what amused her most was his perfect complacency with his way of life and thinking; his unquestioning faith that his way was the right way, and any other way justly a matter of surprise, comment and ridicule. It suggested to Anne parallelisms elsewhere, as circles widen, and helped her own breadth of view in judging him. What the boy had done to be in prison she did not know. She had not thought to ask her father; she could not ask the boy the first morning he came; and, after that, she thought she would rather not know, for his own sake and for the sake of his kinsman, Boone.

Meanwhile the days lengthened, and Anne took long drives in the slow twilights, sometimes with Marshall, but usually with Katherine Craig; and the constant cry of the mountaineer's nature for open air led Boone Stallard on long walks into the fields to keep his blood running and his brain clear. Often Anne, with Marshall or with Katherine, met the mountaineer miles

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from town, striding the road with his hat off; and sometimes, driving alone, she caught a glimpse of his big frame moving across Arnold's Wold in the late dusk. That was as close as she ever saw him; for resolutely he kept his distance from her, and the tractive force of novelty had its effect with Anne. She wanted to see the man again and to talk with him. It was a fact, frankly confessed to Katherine—to anybody who would not have misunderstood her. She was curious about his past, his purpose, his people. So overtaking Colton with the mountaineer one afternoon on the edge of town, she and Katherine took them both into the carriage and drove down the river and out through the Benson Hills. It was like crossing the border-line of her life and his when they passed a little cross-roads store. Several horses were hitched to the fence near by. Several men were whittling on the high stoop. More were pitching horseshoes up the dirt road, and at the blacksmith's shop beyond three stalwart young fellows and a fat old farmer were playing marbles. Stallard smiled as though the scene were familiar. A little farther on was a two-roomed house, half of which was built of logs. At the wood-pile and leaning on his axe, was a tall, gaunt fellow, with a sunburnt blond beard, his trousers in his boots, and the brim of his slouched hat curved over his forehead. Far-

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ther still, a mile or more, they came upon a log cabin with a grape-vine over the door. An old woman, with a basket on one arm, was pushing through the rickety gate. She turned her face toward them as they passed, and peered as though she were straining her eyes through darkness.

“Howdy, mother?” said Stallard.

The old woman gave some quavering answer, and Stallard looked back once. It was the first time he had opened his lips, and the kindness of his voice touched Anne.

“Some people down in these hills are like your people, Stallard,” said Colton. “I don’t know whether they floated down the river, or whether it’s because it’s just hilly down here. They don’t have as many curious words as you folks have; they don’t have feuds; and they don’t call the blue-grass the ‘settleminits,’ and us blue-grass people ‘furriners,’ but otherwise they are pretty much the same.”

Several times Katherine, who sat with Stallard on the rear seat of the old-fashioned victoria, had tried to draw him out; and now Colton’s purpose apparently was to start the mountaineer talking, but he only laughed good-naturedly at the differentiating characterization that Colton tossed off, and settled back into silence.

“It’s all isolation,” Colton went on; “that’s

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what Reynolds was going to say the other night. Isolation arrests development, crystallizes character, makes a people deteriorate. That's his idea, and he says the Kentucky mountaineer has been the most isolated of all the Southern mountaineers—of whom, by the way, there are about three millions, with a territory as big as the German Empire. He has seen fringed hunting-shirts, moccasins, and coon-skin caps in the mountains at this late day. He swears that an old mountaineer once told him about the discovery of America by Columbus. Reynolds listened, solemn as an owl. The old chap called himself a 'citizen,' Reynolds a 'furriner,' and Columbus one of the 'outlandish.' He was a sort of patriarch in his district, a philosopher; he was the man who delivered the facts of progress to the people about him, and it never occurred to him that anybody as young as Reynolds might know about Columbus. The old fellow talked about the Mexican war as though it had been over about ten years, and when he got down to the Secession, well, he actually hitched his chair up to Reynolds's and dropped his voice to a whisper. 'Some folks had other ideas,' he said, 'but hit was his pussonal opinion that *niggahs* was the cause of the war.' Think of it! And when Reynolds left, the old man followed him out to the fence: 'Stranger,' he said, 'I'd ruther you

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wouldn't say nothin' about what I been tellin' ye.' He was one of the few rebel sympathizers in that neighborhood, and he feared violence at that late day for talking too freely about the war. Reynolds claims that the mountaineers were loyal to the Union in '61 because they hadn't got over the fight of 1776, and that these feuds are the spent force of the late war. There were more slave-holders among the Kentucky mountaineers; for that reason, they were more evenly divided among themselves; the war issue became a personal one, and isolation kept them fighting. So you have to go back to the Revolution to understand the mountaineer, and you must give him a lonely century in which to deteriorate before you can judge him fairly. Consider his isolation, says Reynolds, and the wonder is not that he is so bad, but that he isn't worse."

Colton could imitate the dialect well, and Anne listened with amused interest. Stallard laughed and nodded affirmatively, but all the while his eyes were on the passing fields. They had turned off from the river now and through the hills into Anne's land—the blue-grass. Back toward the town was a soft haze; before them, all was clear and brilliant. They had left the locust blossoms dropping meaninglessly into the streets. Here in the fields, Nature was making ready for the days when she can sit with folded

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hands, brooding and happy over work that is all but done. The blue-grass was purpling into soft seas, that rocked as proudly in the wind as the heading wheat and barley and the young green oats, whose silver-gray would be the last passing sheen of the summer's glory. Already the rifled clover blossoms were drooping their heads as the gray spikes of timothy shot exultantly above them. Now and then, from the road-side, came the low, sweet, aimless plaint of a little brown songster, whose name Anne had never learned. Two kingbirds were chasing a crow toward a woodland. Out in the meadow, a starling was poised over his nesting mate, balancing against the breeze, and swearing fealty for one happy month by the crimson on his wings. Quail were calling from the wheat, and larks were wheeling and singing everywhere. Sturdy farm-houses of plain brick stood out here and there from the sunlit fields, and now and then an avenue of locusts gave sight of a portico with great pillars running two stories high. It was a scene of rich peace and plenty, and Stallard's interest was eager, but Anne noticed his face sadden. She remembered this afterward, as she recalled other impressions of the drive, when she had a key to the meaning of them. Once only, when one of the mountaineer's questions to Colton showed how well he knew the country, could she

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ask him if he had not been to the blue-grass before.

"You went to the university, didn't you?" she said.

The careless query seemed almost to startle him. He turned quickly to her and, for the first time, looked straight into her eyes.

"Yes," he said, simply, and he seemed to be waiting for another question that was on Anne's lips; but his look now brought back a sharp memory of his face on the night of the dinner, and made her shrink from the question before Colton and Katherine, as she knew she would shrink if she were with him alone. If he were the same, and if, as she suspected, he remembered her, why was he so palpably making of the matter such a mystery?

It was a short, swift ride, but nobody guessed the significance of it to the mountaineer. Only Anne noticed that when they turned from the gray haze settling over the blue-grass ahead of them, back to the smoke haze over the town, Stallard sank into a moodier silence still; and when they reached the darkening hills, something in his face assailed her once more with an unaccountable pity for him. They were passing the old woman's cabin at the time, and Anne's eyes followed his through the open door, where the old granny was bending over a fire, and the

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light showed the rude table set for the rude supper, and other hard details of the room. To her it was merely a passing picture etched by the light against a dark little ravine, but had she known the memories it brought to Stallard, she would have understood the sudden shadow in his face. The quick throb of her sympathy then made her shake off straightway what she chose to regard as a silly fear; and when they stopped at the Mansion, and Colton was climbing out, she said to Stallard, quite frankly:

“I wish you would come to see me. I want to know all about the mountains and the feuds—and everything.”

Stallard did not answer at once, but looked at her so long and so searchingly that she began to flush, and Katherine, from sheer embarrassment, rose quickly to take Colton's outstretched hand, so little did the mountaineer seem at that moment to be aware of her presence or to care who might hear what he said.

“I'll tell you anything on earth you want to know—some day.”

The tone of his voice made Colton start, and brought dead silence to the four.

Marshall was coming down the steps, and instinctively Anne covered her confusion with a look of dismay to Katherine; she had had an engagement with Marshall; she was getting back

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too late, and he would be angry. Seeing him, Stallard, who had stepped to the pavement, turned sharply from Anne, who was waiting for him to help her out, and held his eyes on Marshall until the latter was several paces down the street. It was a strange thing to do, and it mystified even Colton: but it was merely the mountaineer in him that made him keep his face with watchful suspicion on his enemy; it showed progress in the hostility between the two, and it was partly in answer to the half-contemptuous flash that Marshall gave Stallard, as he coldly lifted his hat.

VIII

BUT again Stallard did not come, and again Anne forgave him. He was exceptional; he was busy; he was shy—and he was not shy; there were a thousand things in addition to the one that was important: she became quite sure that he was avoiding her for some definite reason, and that bothered her a good deal. Once she met him for a moment on the steps of the Capitol and, with intentional lightness, she reminded him of his broken promise. That time he took her words with a seriousness not so deadly; and, thereafter, as the days went by, her fear abated and her interest grew.

Just now she was sitting on the old, worn steps of the ancient Hannah mansion. The blue-grass was rich under the trees around her, the birds were singing as though love were going to live forever, and the soft air was like some comforting human presence. As she rose to start home, she saw Stallard emerge from the old wooden bridge, and she sat down again. The session was doubtless just over and he was going for a walk. He passed along the other side of

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the street without seeing her, and in a moment she rose again. She knew her motive when she hesitated at the gate and turned the same way, smiling indulgently at herself as she walked along, and, a little later, smiling at chance, which is sometimes genial, when she saw that she would meet Stallard where one road turns down the river and another winds up the hill. The mountaineer had been down one way; had changed his mind and was coming back. She stepped from the sidewalk to take the road up the hill, with her face turned to him to speak and expecting him to keep his course; but, without looking up and not hearing her light step, he turned, too, and they met in the middle of the road.

"Are we going the same way?" she asked, without calling him by name.

Surprise a mountaineer and you startle him. It is an inherited trait of people who live primitive lives among the hills and must be on the alert for an enemy. Instantly Stallard's hands were withdrawn from his pockets and a watchful light quickened in his eyes.

"Well," he said, "you skeered me!"

It was the slip of surprise, but Colton had made even vulgarisms like this tolerable for her. Much of the mountaineer's speech was simply obsolete elsewhere, he had explained. The mountaineer clung to old customs, old words,

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old pronunciations, because new ones had never reached him. Certain words were no more incorrect than certain customs were immoral. In the outer world, both were old-fashioned merely.

"I'm goin' up on the hill," he said, with a gesture. "Are you?"

"Yes," she said, simply, for in the fraction of time between his speech and hers she so made up her mind.

The smooth-beaten turnpike, shining like metal ahead of them, was canopied with interwoven branches and dappled with the sunlight that fell through them. Hill, tree, and the singing of birds were on the right hand, and the town lay under its haze of smoke to the left. It is against etiquette in the mountains for a young man and a young woman to stroll unchaperoned in the woods—a guardian seems necessary only for the extremes of civilization—and when Anne suggested turning aside to look for flowers, the mountaineer hesitated instinctively, and then, with a subtler thought, pushed open the little gate that swung from the body of an oak where she had stopped. The leaves in the woods were full, and the sunlight had the gold of autumn.

Stallard began drawing in his breath. "I always come up here when I'm homesick," he said. "It makes me think of the mountains—these hills. There's a mountain tree there, and

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there, and there's another," pointing out a lynn, a chestnut, a beech. "There are mountain birds up here, too"—a polyglot chat was chuckling. "Hear that? My father used to call that the 'plough-bird.' It goes up the trunk of a tree—Gee! Haw!—first to the right and then to the left; then it halts and clucks, just as though it wanted a steer to move on. When it gets to the branches, it drops down through the air as though it were hurt, and begins all over again. And this air"—drawing it into his great chest—"I can smell the roots of that sassafras. There's a spring up here, too. It's the only place where I can get a good drink of water."

It seemed volubility, so long a speech, and it gave Anne a surprise, as did the mountaineer's change of manner. He was quite easy and unconscious now, for he was with her alone, and he was in the woods, where he was at home. They were going up a path through a tangled thicket of undergrowth. A little stream of water tinkled down the ravine like a child prattling to itself, and tinkled dreamily on through dark shadows into the sunlight. A bluebird fluttered across it and, high above them, a cardinal drew a sinuous line of scarlet through the green gloom and dropped with a splutter of fire into a cool pool.

"Well," laughed Stallard, "he's in my spring." Somewhere out in the depths, just

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then, rose cool, flutelike notes, as though satyrs were teaching young fauns to play on reeds. "That's another," said Stallard, delightedly. "It's the first time I've heard him. I don't know what his name is."

"That's a wood-thrush," said Anne, stopping at the base of a tree and sinking down on a root. She had gathered only a few flowers, but she was tired.

Stallard stretched his long length in the grass below her. He was listening to the wood-thrush and, for the moment, he forgot her, or he had not learned that she let little pass unseen; for she was following his mood as it became thoughtful, reminiscent, and passed finally into the deep sadness she had noted on the drive. It was the second time she had ever seen his face relax from the fixed look that made it inscrutable as to all else except some dominant purpose. It had nothing of the dreaming quality of Marshall's pensive moods, it was not temperamental; it came from some definite, tangible source, for it got bitter and hard as the mood held him, even after the bird's gentle fluting ceased a moment and again came like an echo from a distant glade.

"I think you must have forgotten, haven't you?" she asked, again playfully, to divest the question, as well as the memory that it must bring to both, of especial significance.

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He knew what she meant. "Oh no."

"Well, then, it's a good time to begin. I'm waiting." She was pulling a stalk of blue-grass from its casing, and Stallard turned to look full at her. "Why do you want to know?"

It was well that she was doing something, or the sudden question and the peculiar tone of it would have taken her off guard. As it was, there was no need for her eyelashes to lift until the stalk came loose. Then she raised its white base to her lips and bit it off quite calmly.

"You mustn't ask me reasons; you must never ask any woman reasons."

It was her first parry, and she saw that parrying with him was going to be difficult—his thrusts were so out of rule. He was looking at her in a blunt, penetrating way, and she did not lift her eyes until his face was turned again toward the faint piping of the thrush. She was not ready to enter that question with herself, much less with him.

"There ain't much to tell," he was saying, slowly. "I live at the head-waters of the Cumberland, where the mountains are purty steep. A neighbor of mine fell out of his own corn-field once and broke his neck. I went to school in a log-house for three months in winter for three years, working and studying at home between times. I stopped then because I knew more than

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the man who was teaching the school. I made enough money, logging, to get to the Bible college at Lexington. I soon found out I wasn't called to be a preacher, so I went over into the College of Arts. I worked in the professors' gardens; I did my own cooking—anything—everything. It took me six years, but I got through. I went back home and I taught school and I studied law. Then I practised at my country-seat until I ran for the Legislature. That's all."

That was all. It was a plain record of plain facts, and Anne knew not half the tale of hardship that was left untold; what the bitter, patient fight with the hard conditions of his birth had been, she could not even guess.

"Yes, it was a purty hard row," he added, simply, as though he were following her thoughts; "but I'd hoe it over again if it had to be done—for one reason, anyhow—because I can do more for my people. But for that I think, sometimes, that I wouldn't, if I were back at the beginning, knowing what I know now, and had my choice. It nearly cost me my religion, and it left me hung midway between heaven and hell. Then I've learned to rebel against what I can't escape, and to value what I can never get."

Stallard's face settled back into reverie, and there was a long silence—so little was there that

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Anne could say. She was curious to know definitely what he meant; he had opened the way, whether purposely or not, for her to ask, but she swerved from the question, and asked quite another:

“Where did you learn to speak?”

Stallard laughed. “I never learned. It’s natural, what there is of it. I used to pray in meetin’s when I was a boy. Then I used to speak in college. I never could write a speech—I have to talk offhand. That’s the way I made my valedictory.” He laughed again, and Anne gave a little cry of surprise.

“Yes, I remember; that was you, too.”

“You heard of that?” he asked.

“Who didn’t?” was her answer, and Stallard’s face shone.

It was epoch-making in the history of valedictories at the old university—that speech; and the pathos of it was unintentional and quite unconscious. A big, rough, manly countryman had stepped out and spoken from a slip of notes in his hand. He was not sorry to go, he said, calmly. He had worked hard; he had asked no favors, incurred no obligation. He had come as rough material; he had paid for the privilege of being planed down. The professors were paid to plane him down. He had tried to do his duty; he believed they had done theirs. He had no

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personal gratitude to express to anybody. Nor had he any pathetic farewell to make to the people of the town. He had received no hospitality at their hands. He had been under hardly a single roof outside the campus. He knew the face of hardly a woman before him. He had not a word of complaint or blame. There was no reason why the facts of his college life should have been otherwise; only they were not. The honor of the valedictory had not been conferred on him by his classmates, nor by the professors, nor by the people of the town. He had won that, working for something else. He knew what the valedictorian was expected to do. He had been listening to valedictories for six years. He could not doubt the sincerity of his predecessors, but he must tell what was the truth for him; and doing that, he could not follow them. He had his little memories, associations, friendships; they were few, but they were too sacred for him to bid them farewell from that platform. He had come an alien—an alien he was going away. And he was glad to go—to get to other work. He would have liked to give them high-wrought sentiment, shining metaphors; to wring them with the agony of farewell into tears even; but he had to tell the truth. The truth was what he had told, and more to tell there was not. So speaking, he sat down.

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The good old president sat through it bewildered and pained. The professor of English looked mad. The bluff old professor of Greek was laughing in his eyes and under his right hand, which covered his mouth. The dean of the Bible college, who had labored to save Stallard's soul from perdition and his powers for the church, was openly resentful and hurt; while the little man who helped experiments in the laboratory was laughing in his sleeve at them all. The same variety of results was perceptible in the house. Only the editor of the town paper and a few scattered bold spirits broke into applause, but the hall hummed just the same, and the speaker was the man of the day.

"Why, I'm not a patchin' to Sherd Raines," Stallard went on—"the fellow I roomed with at college. He and I made a bargain when I found out I wasn't 'called.' He said he'd teach the folks at home religion if I'd teach 'em law."

"What are you going to do—what do you want to do?"

"My best, always, and let the rest go. I'm a fatalist, I reckon, as I found out when I studied moral philosophy. I take what comes, if it is better than what I have. I have my wishes, my hopes, even a definite ambition; but I shan't risk wrecking my life on it, especially when what I most wish for I knew nothing of until it was

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too late to acquire it, if it was not denied me even to acquire it, when I was born."

He pulled down the brim of his hat and looked away. Some instinct, some fear held her back from asking just what he meant, and she watched him, greatly puzzled. She was sure now that his was the strongest face she had ever seen; and his history was as plain in it as it was in his words. There was not a line about brow, nose, mouth, or chin that was not chiselled into force of character, force of purpose. If there was a hint of contradiction in his make-up, it was too fine for her vision, keen as that was. It was the flawlessness in this one bulwark of strength that had drawn her and made her fear. She shrank from his eyes when he turned all at once to her; there was a light in them that was not pleasant.

"I wonder if you could guess what turned me away from religion to law?"

He pointed to the yellow dome of the Capitol through a rift in the trees, and she knew the half of what he meant—that he meant Marshall. "I was in the Bible college, and the first Commencement I ever saw was his. I heard his speech; he had the salutatory; and I was right under him, looking up into his face. He spoke over my head and never saw me. It was Kentucky for the Kentuckians—his speech—and he

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didn't let us mountain folks in at all. I couldn't catch his eye when he spoke of my people as he did down there in the House the other day. I knew him the moment he got up, and I felt just as I did away back in college. It's kind o' like a storm down in the mountains when the river is high. I can hear the wind crashing the big trees together and the water roar. Lightning just seems to flash in front of my eyes, and I can hear the thunder—I tell you, I can *hear* it. That's the way it is below." Stallard moved his hand to and fro, as though he were on some peak and the elements were raging under him. "I'm up above somehow"—tapping his forehead—"an' I seem to have the strength of them all right here"—stretching out his right hand and gripping it—"and I know that what I want to do then, is done. I know that now. That's the way I felt after his speech in college that day when the band crashed in from the gallery; and the people clapped their hands; and the ushers, with flowers in their button-holes and their canes wrapped in red and white and blue ribbons, carried him up notes and flowers; and everybody talked and smiled and nodded; and he sitting upon the platform, looking red and proud and happy. I must have been a great fool, for I could hardly keep from getting up right then and shouting out, 'Brother, you ain't the only

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man as can do that ' ; and, thank God, the time did come at last."

Stallard stopped short, seeing Anne's pained and helpless face. He had spoken quietly, but a zigzag streak of red had run up and down each side of his face, and he had had to stop, now and then, in the hesitancy that with him meant violent emotion. Anne did not speak again until she saw that he had himself in hand once more.

" I was there that day," she found herself saying, partly that he might not think she was shifting too suddenly away from the theme.

" Yes," he said, quickly. " I saw you. You dropped your umbrella, and you waited for me to pick it up—out on the steps."

He spoke calmly and as though with a quickly made resolution, and the girl started and listened—surprised, perplexed, and watching with the strength of her soul in her eyes.

He knew then; he had known all along; why— And then, because the woman in her could not help herself:

" Why didn't you pick it up? "

He did not answer. If he even heard her, he did not show it; he was going on as though she were asking him quite another question:

" Yes, my people live down in the mountains; they have been there a hundred years. My

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father is dead. My mother is at home, and one married sister, whose worthless husband was killed in the feud. My sister is hardly older than you, I imagine, and yet she looks old enough to be your mother. She has four children, and she has worked in the fields"—Anne shrank, and he saw—"not before her marriage, mind you, nor since her husband's death. Let me see your hand."

She held it out with the sensation of obeying an unspoken command. He looked at it intently—the pink nails, long white fingers, the thread-like veins in the round wrist—but he did not touch it.

"Her's is like mine," he said, turning over his broad palm. "It's hard and rough and sunburnt; and his looks as soft as yours, almost."

"Haven't you any brothers?" she asked, quickly, to turn him away from the dangerous theme; and then she trembled at her own question, for Stallard started visibly and did not reply at once.

"Two," he said, at last. "One is at home—he is a half-brother; and the other"—his tone got harsh, he rose suddenly to his feet, and answered with his back to her: "He's in jail."

"Oh—" It was a swift cry of pain, of apology, and it was enough.

The mountaineer had turned full upon her.



“He’s in jail.”

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“ I want you to know—everything. My mother can’t write her own name. My sister barely can. My father made his mark, though his father’s father wrote a better hand than I do—an old deed shows that. My mother is rough, ignorant, not a lady as you would say, though she is the best woman I know on earth. They are all mountaineers, ignorant mountaineers; as Marshall would call them,” he added, bitterly, “ ‘ pore white trash.’ My brother is in jail, as he deserves to be.”

And then Stallard went on to tell about that brother; how he had done all he could to keep him from the evil to which, as a boy even, he seemed irresistibly drawn. How he had kept aloof from the feud in which his brother had taken an active part; how the latter had sunk lower and lower until just punishment had caught him at last. He himself was like his mother; his brother was more violent and had less restraint, like his father; that was the difference between the two. The turn of a hand and each might have had the other’s fate. That was the way of chance.

“ My mother’s people came from eastern Virginia, like yours. They owned slaves, like yours. Yours came here; mine stayed in the wilderness. You kept your level; we went down; through no virtue of yours, no fault of ours. It was fate.

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I think of Marshall and you, and of my sister and me. You were born so; we were born so. For that reason what's yours without the asking is not ours at any cost—not now. If there's a worse blow in the face of a man who does the best with what comes to him than to learn the value of what he can never get, I hope it may be spared me. To be willing to do anything, deny everything, and to know that neither the one nor the other can ever wholly count, that—" Stallard waved his hand, through sheer inability to go on. Neither knew the full and personal significance of what he said, but through it all the girl sat pained and mute, touched too deep down for tears. She kept silent, even when they rose and went down the path again, though Stallard, with unsuspected delicacy, turned his talk again to the birds and trees. Only when he reached the gate at the oak did he strike the chord again.

"I didn't pick it up," he said, "because I didn't even see it until you started down for it yourself. I was looking at you. I had followed you out of the hall to see you again. And no day has passed since, no hour hardly, that I have not seen you looking at me with a smile, just as you looked then. It is not so strange. You want to see the best in the world, know the best, be the best. Don't you think it would be

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easy, then, for you to remember your first vision of what you realized was the best? Especially when, thereafter, you are shut off for years from all that is best? I couldn't have forgotten you, if I had tried. Sometimes I have tried. But for you, after all, I might not have gone on. I might be living in a log cabin in the mountains, and tied there, with a wife and children, forever—and it might be the better for me if I were. But you helped open to me the world against which I am still knocking for entrance—you and he—see what I owe you—yes, and *him*, too. And you are helping open it now—the same world which, I am afraid, is barred me as heaven is, for, without cowardice or disloyalty, I can never escape my own. I didn't know you at first—" He stopped, holding her eyes with his, so that, in the moment of silence, she felt weak and afraid and was glad when he went on. "You are not as lovely as I thought you were"—she could not smile even to herself at his honesty—"and no wonder. Your face has always been the face of something unearthly to me, and now I see the human. I didn't know you until you smiled at me the other night, when you were singing, and I never quite know you as the same, unless you look as you looked then—as you look now," he added, for Anne was smiling faintly. Stallard's voice was so gentle and kind, and it

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was all so strange. He never dreamed that she could doubt a scintilla of what he said; nor did she, strange as it all was.

Stallard had opened the gate and, mountaineerlike, had gone through first and was holding it open for her. As she passed through she paused, lifting her eyes suddenly to his.

“I saw you that day—I remember, too.” The words rose impulsively to her half-open lips, but some vague dread held them back.

The sun was cutting like a great red scimitar down through a shadowed hill in the west. Arnold's Wold was already in dusk. A cloud of smoke was rising above the prison, and the Catholic cross rose whitely through it, as though swung down from above. There was still a purple glow edging the clouds in the east, and the marble on the hill caught the last light sadly. To Anne the past hour was already taking the misty shape of a dream—into such a melodrama had the facts of both their lives in that hour been cast, in spite of the simple, open story Stallard had told. In no way had he made an appeal to her pity, or to her sympathies; for that reason, he had both wholly. Outwardly now, as they went down the hill, he was ironlike once more; but there was a softer ring in his voice when he spoke, and a new tone of understanding. On the old bridge he stopped—looking up stream.

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A long raft of logs was floating down the river toward them.

"That's the way I came down to go to college," he said, smiling. "I walked from here to Lexington."

A mountaineer was standing at the huge stern oar, motionless. As the end of the raft swung under them they could hear him singing; and, still smiling, Stallard bent his head to listen.

"I've got a gal at the head of the holler,
Heh-o-dee-um-dee-eedle-dahdy-dee!"

And then he swept the big paddle through the water. Anne, too, smiled; it was the song the young trusty sang in the garden. Stallard bent lower and sang back.

"She won't come, an' I won't foller."

The fellow looked quickly up, gave a "hoo-ray," and, with a wave of his hat, sent the refrain up with a hearty swing,

"Heh-o-dee-um-dee-eedle-dahdy-dee!"

"He doesn't know me, but he knows that I know where he's from," said Stallard. "I used to go over to the Kentucky River and bring logs down that way. We'd tie up to the bank, and then we'd all go up the middle of the street single

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file. We didn't know what the sidewalks (hearth-stones I remember old Tom Perkins used to call them) were for. We went back part of the way on the train, and we climbed through the windows, not knowing where the doors were. We called the cars 'boxes.' One fellow climbed over the fence to his boarding-house, never having seen a gate. I didn't much expect in those days that I'd be walking along here some day as a member of the 'Legislatur,' as we say, and with the Governor's daughter, and she the same——"

He stopped suddenly and stiffened. At the end of the bridge was Marshall, who stepped aside with unnecessary ceremony and, lifting his hat, bowed with elaborate courtesy. Not until he saw Anne's flush, did Stallard notice that Marshall was almost staggering. At the steps of the Mansion, Anne left her hand in Stallard's as though she would say one of the thousand things that were on her tongue; but her lip quivered, and that was all.

IX

THE session drew to a close. Several times, Anne had met Stallard in the street and he spoke merely, lifting his hat now, and passed on. She had asked him once if he expected to come back the following year. His answer was that he didn't know; he would come, if he were sent; but that he did not mean to turn his hand over for a renomination. Considering the extraordinary coincidence of their lives, the extraordinary disclosure which linked the present with the past, and the possible fact that, in a few weeks, he might see her for the last time, his course now was inexplicable. He kept to his seclusion rigidly. She could not believe that his interest in her was impersonal, that he regarded her as merely a spiritual embodiment of certain conditions that were denied him at birth, that he wanted to attain, and which he believed were beyond him altogether. It was only after much thought that the truth flashed and seared her to the heart. He saw the gulf between them. He believed she thought it impassable, and, with his strong sense and sure insight, he, too, saw that

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it was. He was too proud to make an effort to bridge the gulf—too loyal to his own people to cross it alone, if he could. He would walk with them on his own side; and with this resolution he must do as he was doing. She liked his pride, and, for that reason, the hard conditions on which he must uphold it wrung her the more with pity.

Marshall, too, she rarely saw, and she knew the reason. He had not been to the Mansion since the night she and Stallard met him at the bridge. What she heard of the two men in the House kept her continually uneasy: for no matter came up there in which Stallard and Marshall did not antagonize each other, and Marshall said sharp things which, from Stallard's lips, Anne knew, would bring about trouble.

To many, Marshall's bitterness seemed unreasonable, but perhaps there was only one other person, than Colton, who so much as suspected that his hostility was not altogether political: that was Katherine Craig. She saw the inner play of his mind, of which Marshall himself was hardly conscious, and she sensibly kept it to herself. Hitherto, Marshall had met his rivals chivalrously, as he would have met them, man to man, in any conflict—as he would have met Stallard, had the mountaineer been a gentleman. He always said that he had never known jealousy—that a common admiration was to him a

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link of sympathy rather than a cause of hate—and to his rivals he was especially courteous. A foreign lover got from no one a more hospitable welcome than from Marshall; but, with Stallard, it was different. The mountaineer had shown himself a boor by exposing his enmity before ladies and in a drawing-room. War was declared between the two before he had even looked upon Stallard as a possible rival. Not that he seriously saw him in that light yet—but, still, he was far too keen not to feel the hold the mountaineer had; and it vexed him with Anne, to whom he dared not open his lips, and gave a surprising force to his feeling against Stallard. The mountaineer had power as an orator. But one thing appealed to the girl more—political honor—and that, he knew, Anne believed the mountaineer irresistibly bound to achieve. These would win her admiration, her interest, her respect; and that much Stallard already had—yes, he confessed quickly, and more. The mountaineer was, in her eyes, a man with a people behind him—a people who had drifted back toward barbarism through no fault of their own. They were kindred in distress, and his mission was to aid, to uplift. Moreover, he was new to her in all ways, and he had not dropped, like the others, at once to her feet. Such points of favor, Marshall counted, could

never win Stallard more than deep interest, deep friendship, perhaps. The idea of love would be as repugnant to her, he believed, as it was to him. Intellectually, she was quite democratic, and she avowed democracy, but in her exactions and deepest feelings she was aristocrat to her heart's core. Thus far, Marshall could go; thus far, he went. But how Stallard's personal history, his early upward fight, his frank facing of the facts of his birth, his just bitterness that fate should draw the dead-line for one man who wanted to cross it and suffer another to be born on the other side and care nothing for the advantage; how the secret inner sorrow that his brother had put upon him stirred her passionate pity—of all that he knew nothing, or he might have been uneasy indeed.

Anne found herself in a curious maze. This brother of Stallard's was, of course, Buck, the young trusty; that was doubtless what he had yet to tell her. Criminals, after conviction, were sent to the penitentiary from all parts of the State; she knew that, but she did not know that moonshiners were not; and in some way she had come to believe that the young trusty's crime was "moonshining," which she had come to regard, through Buck's testimony and Colton's strictures on the revenue service, with much tolerance and a good deal of sympathy.

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"It wasn't no harm once," Buck argued. "Ever'body made liquor—some fellers was jus' born to it. An' say, s'posin' you had a field o' corn in some deep hollow. You can't tote hit out an', if you did, you couldn't sell nary a grain. An' s'posin' you had a big family an' you jus' had to have somep'n to eat—coffee an' sweetenin' an' sech. Whar you git the money? Thar's the corn an' that's all. Well, the corn is yourn, hain't it? Yes. Well, you can do whut you please with what's yourn, can't ye? You can put that corn in a pile an' burn hit if you wants to, can't ye? You can give hit away? Well, the only way you can git money fer that corn is to build ye a still an' turn hit into moonshine an' carry hit over into Virginny an' sell hit. An' I'd jus' like to know what right the Gover'mint—whut all our folks fit fer—has to step up, all of a sudden, an' say: 'Here, gimme some o' the money you got fer that corn o' yourn, or go to jail.' "

This was the boy's tale, and she forgave much to sincerity of motive no matter how mistaken it might be, and she had quite accustomed herself to thinking of him as the victim of circumstances and of a misdemeanor that was not in itself criminal. Thinking that, she had allowed her interest in him to deepen unreservedly; she had suffered him much liberty of speech; and

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now, Stallard had hinted at something in his brother as dark as crime could be: so that she was unsmiling the next time Buck came to work, but full of pity, as she watched him under a newspaper with which she shaded her eyes from the sun. Was it possible that this brightfaced lad, with his careless laughter and his easy chatter, had human blood on his hands?

"Hit's this way, Miz Anne," he was saying. "One o' them wars jus' knocks the fun out'n ever'thing. Somebody gives a party. Thar's Keatons thar, an' thar's Stallards thar. Purty soon thar's a row, an' the party is busted up. Folks is afeerd now to have parties. Sometimes a Stallard and a Keaton is a-courtin' the same gal, an' sometimes they both goes to see her the same night. Commonly, they makes the gal say which one she likes best an' t'other one takes his foot in his hand an' lights fer home; but I knowed a case once whar the gal said she jus' didn't plumb know which."

The boy was wily as a fox; he stopped there. Something was wrong that morning—he saw it in Anne's face—and he was trying to get her interested.

"What happened then?" she asked, partly because she wanted to know, partly because he was waiting for the question.

"Well, they jus' stepped out'n doors an' fit.

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An' when Jim Stallard was a-gittin' the best o' Tom Keaton, the gal gits to cryin'; an' when Jim gits him down, she runs up an' pulls Jim off by his ha'r; an' Jim says the next time he fights fer a gal he wants to be the feller what's licked."

The girl laughed, when she felt close to tears. Once she thought of asking him outright if he were a brother to Boone Stallard, but it was no longer possible; when the mountaineer wanted her to know, he would himself tell: and Anne went in-doors, much troubled.

That day, to her distress, all her doubt was dissolved.

In the afternoon she took some friends of her father through the prison. Passing through the dust-cloud of a room in which prisoners were making laths, her eyes caught the face and shape of a convict who was running a thin plank through one of the circular saws. The jaw of the face was square and strong; the cheek toward her was sunken as though by a bullet or a knife thrust; and, while she looked at him, the man, as though to answer her gaze, lifted his dusty brows, and the cold, evil eyes under them met hers and, dropping at once back to his work, left her shuddering. Almost unconsciously she touched the warden's arm.

"Who is that man?"

The convict fell into a violent fit of coughing

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as she spoke, and, when the warden turned, Buck the trusty was nodding brightly to her, side by side with the man she meant.

"Oh, his name's Stallard—from down in the mountains—one of those feuds—murder. He's a pretty bad fellow; everybody asks about him. He's got a brother in the Legislature," he added to another of the party; but Anne heard him, and was sunk in such sudden wretchedness that she did not repeat her question. She felt her pity deepening for Stallard as she walked home, and when she went to her room that night, she was seeking palliation for the young trusty. It was hard to believe that he was evil in soul—he was so light-hearted, open, frank, and humorously curious. She found herself going back to the time when men exacted a blood penalty for a slain kinsman. She recalled the boy's words:

"S'posin' somebody was to shoot down your brother, an' the law wouldn't tech him—not couldn't, now, mind ye — *wouldn't*. What would you do? What would any feller do?"

Then she faced the question; what, under such circumstances, would her own father do? She would learn the details before she judged the boy. No, she must not do even that; Stallard would tell her these when he wanted her to know, No; she— The thread was snapped there. Why was she trying to defend this boy? For

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his own sake, or through her pity of Stallard? Had the lad appealed to her on his own account? Yes, but, ah!—and just there the white hands slipped from the bright hair they had been loosening, and Anne sank into a chair by the window, looking out with startled eyes into the June night. When she went to bed, she lay there sleepless and a little frightened. She could not put one image outside her vision: now and then, in her half-conscious dreams, the young trusty would displace it; now and then, Marshall; oftenest of the three, the convict with the sunken cheek: but it always swung back before her closed eyes in the darkness, fixed, calm, inscrutable—the face of Stallard, the mountaineer.

X

SHE did not go down to breakfast next morning. She stayed abed and, early in the afternoon, Katherine Craig came with disturbing news. Down in the mountains, Colton had told her, Mace Keaton was at his deviltry again. He had elected himself sheriff, and had suffered a Stallard to be shot down within sight of him and had not raised his hand. Both parties were once more armed and organized, and the Keatons had taken to "the brush." The judge who had gone to the county-seat to hold court had been driven from town. Any day there might be a general conflict.

Elsewhere, Katherine had heard more. Marshall meant to bring up that day his old bill to disrupt the county. He would be bitter; and lately Stallard's patience, it was said, was being worn to an edge. Trouble was feared.

About that time, in the House, Marshall was rising to his feet. He repeated all he had said and more—bitterly. He addressed himself straight to the gentleman from Roland. Could he deny such and such, and such and such? And

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Stallard had to sit through it all, white and silent, for Marshall, drinking as he was, took care to state only facts. Still, the spirit of his talk was vindictive. It looked as though he wanted to bring about a mortal quarrel, and Colton, who was watching the mountaineer's face, believed it was going to come. The ticking of the big clock could be heard when the mountaineer rose, but there was no answering invective. Not once did Stallard's tone rise above the level of quiet conversation. He was pale and his eyes were bright, but in no other way did he show unusual emotion. The facts were as the gentleman had stated. He had said much; he had implied a good deal—that was irrelevant and unnecessary. It was not the place where those things should be said, discussed or answered. The gentleman seemed to hold him personally responsible for the lawlessness of his people. Very well, he would accept and bear the responsibility, and he pledged that body that he personally would see that law and order, in the end, prevailed.

The pressure of affairs—for the term was growing short—and Marshall's manner and condition were already seriously against his bill. Stallard's temperate words defeated it, and Marshall's face, flushed as it was, paled a little. He was standing in the lobby, when Colton came out, and a friend had him by the arm and was trying

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to lead him away. He tried to break loose when Stallard appeared, and Colton saw the mountaineer's mouth tighten and a dangerous light leap from his eyes as he stopped still and waited. Another friend caught Marshall's arm, and Stallard walked on as though he had seen nothing. But he went on with a quickening step over the bridge, and he walked the hills till dark. The animal in him that he had been slowly netting with such care was straining at its cords now. It is never securely bound in a nature as close to earth as Stallard's was; and nothing will make it restive like the kindly eyes and voice of a woman and a rival claim for them. It had turned with leaping fury in Stallard and made him primeval again. Marshall was not fooling him. He knew the true reason for the bitter hostility of that day. Marshall feared him without, as well as within, the legislative chamber. The mountaineer had no traditions of chivalry to hold him in check; and he went on stripping himself, stripping Marshall, until soul to soul the two faced in a mortal fight for mastery. And could Anne have seen his face when the moon rose on it out in the fields, she would have heard her heart beat. Had Marshall been face to face with him in fact, as he was in mind, the mountaineer would have killed him and gone striding on through the fragrant dusk, an exultant savage.

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It was late when he got back, but the strain of his heart and his brain was eased; and the inner structure that a strong soul builds on religion first, and then on a love of law that is born of a love of people who are in need of restraint, was firm within him again. He got to his room and to his books with the tempest in him calm, and the old, old resolution freshly made to run his course, as he had started, to the end.

He had a hard time with his law that night. Things were always passing between his eyes and the page that blurred the print; and he was glad when the hour came for the walk that was a nightly custom with him after his task was done. Not that he needed exercise that night; but the walk always took him past Anne Bruce's house, and it was for that sole reason that he went now. There was a dim light in the hallway, but the parlor was dark, and so was Anne's room, which he had come to know from seeing her at her window, half screened by maple leaves. As he passed the rear of the hotel beyond, music started through the open windows above him, and he remembered that the last hop of the season was going on that night. Anne was doubtless there—and Marshall. Farther up the street, an unusual clinking of glasses came from behind a pair of green shutters, and there was an unusual stir on the portico and in the hallway of the

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hotel. At the top of the steps stood Colton in evening dress, mopping his face with a handkerchief. Stallard had declined to go when Colton urged him that morning, but he let himself be dragged up-stairs now to the door of the ball-room, and there he halted and stood—a grave, unsmiling statue—looking on. He had never seen waltzing before, and, while he watched, his mind was on a dance at home—a log cabin, a fiddle and a banjo, a puncheon floor, and men in jeans and cowhide boots swinging girls in linsey under low, blackened rafters and through the wavering light of a tallow dip. And the prompting: “Balance all! Swing yer pardners! Cage the bird! Grand right an’ *wrong*! Fust lady to the right—*cheat* an’ swing.” What a contrast! Katherine smiled at him as she whirled past, and, through the dancers, he saw Anne at the other end of the room and, near her, Marshall—dark, grave, and faultless in dress and bearing. Already she was gathering up her wraps and, when the dance was over, she was moving on Marshall’s arm toward the door. She was going home, and Stallard shrank back that she might not see him. As she passed, he saw that she was biting her lip under a forced smile, and Marshall was frowning darkly. Something was wrong between the two, and it pleased him savagely.

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He did not wait long after they were gone; the brilliant scene thrust him farther and farther from Anne. Even to his eyes she was marked from every other woman in the room by her simple presence, which seemed out of keeping with the rush and whirl of the place. And if she were out of place in these lights, with this music, among these dainty things in white—how would she seem at home? The thought stung him, as he turned away; it added to his store of bitterness, but it helped make his purpose firm.

The Mansion was only two blocks distant, and straight on Stallard's way home. The door opened just as he was passing by on the other side of the street, and, having stopped unconsciously in the thick shadow of a maple, he feared to move on. Marshall came out, with his hat in his hand, and Anne stood in the door. It was after midnight, and the street was still. Marshall turned and began talking in a low tone and rapidly. Anne leaned in the doorway, with her hands behind her. Her attitude was indifferent and her face looked hard. She made no answer as Marshall moved down the steps, and, for the second time that day, an exultant fire ran through him. She stood a little while just as Marshall had left her, and then she came to the edge of the porch, looking across through the darkness where he was hungrily watching her.

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Her eyes seemed almost to be on him, as he stood uneasy and noiseless, but she turned and closed the door. He saw the light in the drawing-room and in the hall go out and, a moment later, another appear up-stairs; then her face through the leaves at the window and one hand reaching up for the curtain; and he stayed on, just to see her shadow pass now and then, till the room was dark.

He started for his room then, little reckoning how the girl lay looking with sleepless eyes into the darkness above her, mystified, perplexed, distressed. It was the first time Marshall had been to the Mansion for a long while, and they had had the worst of their many quarrels. She had heard of the trouble in the House fully, and her sympathies sided resistlessly with Stallard. Marshall *was* wrong, she tried to argue; it was a matter of justice, she said—as though justice guided a woman's sympathies, she thought, before the words had quite left her lips. Still, she had spoken as though Stallard were a stranger to both, and Marshall, with one reckless word, had made the matter personal. Then was she very plain with him. She rarely tried to hide the truth, even when there was no need for it to be known; for she was fearless of criticism and especially, just now, of his—for she thought him bitter and unjust. So, in her defence of the

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mountaineer, she indirectly laid bare her interest in him, and Marshall was startled. She feared that, in the heat of the moment, she had put that interest too strong; and she herself was startled to realize how little she had fallen short of the truth.

A revolution took place that night. Grown reckless at last, Anne faced fact after fact, extraordinary as each was, and finally went to troubled sleep, ceasing to question.

XI

IT was well for the three that the session came to a quick end. Marshall went to his farm; Stallard to the mountains; Anne stayed on at the capital: the summer came and gave the three time to think.

Anne saw the leaves grow full, the hills round with beauty, and the flowers go. When the trees got dusty and the hot days came, she too went home. She saw nothing of Marshall; she heard nothing, and she was not surprised; for she knew his moods and his ways, she thought, beyond the chance of error. Nobody saw Marshall during those days; for he stayed at home, passing his own test of fire. Anne had cut his pride to the quick. The mountaineer had started with nothing, and had accomplished all that human effort could; while he, wanting nothing, had done only what his birth and station had impelled him to do: that was the blunt burden of the contrast that he had drawn on himself from Anne. In other and plainer words, he was little more than a machine, run by the momentum of forces that were prenatal. He deserved little credit for

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what he had done, and great censure for not having done more. That was the final courageous interpretation he gave her words, and it was not long before his self-searching honesty began to tell him that it was all true. His humiliation was bitter, but his hurt pride was turned into a power for good, and started a change in him that nothing else had ever been able to effect; for it forged and edged a purpose—started him on a course of grim self-denial and turned him to work.

A century back, new life was put into the lazy Virginia blood that fought its way over the Cumberland and along the Wilderness Road to the interior; it needed only antagonism then to give it new strength, and the vigor of that pioneer effort is far from spent. It is the bed-rock of the Kentuckian's character to-day, and a shaft, sunk through his easy good-humor, rarely fails to rest on it at last. That far down, the differences between Marshall and Stallard practically ceased; down there, they would meet as granite meets granite, when a great test should come. But now, thanks to the guidance, since, of an unseen Hand, the mountaineer must fight away from the earth for strength, as Marshall, for help, must fight back to it: and the love of the same woman was the motive power that led them opposite ways.

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They were long days that summer, and days of gain to both, but the Hand still bore with unequal weight on the mountaineer. Marshall saw his blue-grass stripped and stored, the grain harvested, the corn turn yellow for the knife. With the first crisp touch of frost, he was busy in the hemp-fields. Then came the brooding days of autumn, the gentle, pensive haze of Indian-summer, and the drowsy rest of nature filled his mother's heart and brought to his turbulent spirit an unguessed measure of peace.

Not a word came from the mountaineer. His mountains had swallowed him, as they swallow everything that passes their blue summits. Once Anne saw in a newspaper that the leaders in the Keaton-Stallard feud had met, shaken hands, and signed a truce; and that Boone Stallard had brought the reconciliation about. It was the one fact that she heard of him through the autumn, and she thought of him a good deal; for she was living alone; she had much time for speculations and dreams: and, moreover, the way of chance is strange. Had Stallard been an acute student of woman's nature, had he given years of study to Anne Bruce's heart and brain, and then have deliberately chosen the way to reach both, it is doubtful whether he could have picked a better part or have played it with better skill. To show his secret with every act and look, and but

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once—and barely then—with a spoken word; to trouble her with no exactions; to give all, in a word, and ask nothing; to be strong—so strong as to make her feel, with a vague dissatisfaction, that there was in him something stronger even than his love for her, and then to pass out of her life as silently as he came into it—to pass on and out of life altogether for aught she knew—there was hardly a detail left undone. For she read, later, that the truce was broken once more; she saw Buck Stallard's name among the prisoners whose time was done, and that surprised her and gave her great relief; that his crime was complicity in a feud—not murder—and that perplexed her and made her wonder. Then came news of a fight in which Buck had taken part and two Stallards were killed. One of them might have been Boone. Any other than he would have sent her word, if he were alive. Silence in another man would have been inexplicable—it meant nothing in Stallard. He had never so much as said that he was coming back; he had said, indeed, that he would not turn over his hand for the chance to return. He had said that—and yet he loved her: he had loved no other; his love, born years ago with a look, had suffered no change, no displacement: all this he had given her to understand as plainly as he could have put it into words. She would have

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smiled at such a tale in another man, and yet she hardly wondered at it in Stallard: she simply thought it strange that fate had made it so. Now he was gone—gone for good, as far as she knew. It would have been beyond reason in another man—it meant nothing in an inscrutable enigma like him. He was dead, even, as far as she knew; he might be and she not know; for once she had gone so far as to write Colton, who, too, had heard not a word. So, day by day, wondering, fearing, thinking—more than was good for her, good as it all was for Stallard's place in her heart—Anne had to wait and be patient till Christmas should come and the new year, when the session would open again. Then she would know, and not till then.

One thing only was there for her to know that summer, that would have distressed her less than news of his death, and that was the storm and stress of his life. He had told Anne the truth. He had gone home with the resolution not to lift hand or foot to secure his renomination. Apparently no move was necessary; for, by the terms of the truce, Mace Keaton had left the mountains for a year, to give the heated blood of both factions time to cool; and, without Mace, there was no man to oppose him. So Boone Stallard gathered his mother's thin corn in peace, as did other Stallards and Keatons their corn, and it

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was the first summer in many years that many of either name had worked in the fields, without a rifle close at hand and the fear of an enemy lurking near in ambush. It was a time of inner tumult to the mountaineer, for it was an old story retold now—his coming back home, his revulsion from its narrow life; the rough talk of his friends in the presence of their daughters and wives; the rustic uncouthness of the young women; the painful pity that attacked him when he newly realized the hard lot of his mother and sister, whose unconsciousness made the pathos of it the more piteous to know how helpless he was to aid them in more than the simple needs of existence; how beyond him to broaden or uplift them, so crystallized were they in the way of life that had been moulded for them so long. Contrast—it was all bitter, hopeless contrast, when he saw his mother in the cabin at night with her pipe; his sister with hers, now; the neighbors drifting in with hats on, and barefooted sometimes—men and women; the talk—it struck him now with ludicrous inconsistency—of homicide and the Bible, the last killing and the doctrine of original sin—from the same lips, with hardly a breath to bridge the chasm between. Even in his early days, a sullen rebellion against the chains of birth would break loose within him; and now, with Anne's face always looking from

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water, mist, and moonlight, the rebellion was fierce; and half-crazed sometimes, he would start up the mountain, after his work was done, and climb until there was no leaf between him and the stars. There he would have it out with his own soul, and with the wide heaven that had put him where he was and did not chain him there. And there his strong courage upheld him, even when he was deepest sunk in helplessness, and he would go down under cover of darkness to look at the old, patient, unembittered face of his mother, and sometimes he would go to bed with a half-born resolution, since he was cast there, to stay there and share their fate, and not try to breathe an air that was thin for him and would stifle them. Then would it come over him, with an awful sense of desolation, how unspeakably absurd were the high-wrought dreams that every thought of Anne once brought him. Where was the place for her? For the delicately nurtured, exquisitely dressed, fastidious girl who, with all the favor she had shown him, yet seemed as distant from the rough background that lay close behind his life, as though her home were the clouds and his the earth forever. But it was his second self that spoke in this way—the self that was born of contact with civilization; for, whether it be the pride of independence or the complacency of isolation, the mountaineer, recog-

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nizing no social chasm, believes deep down in his heart that he is the peer of any and the inferior of none. Even with Stallard, this feeling was not dead, and, with him, in the end, little that was antagonism counted for more than the weight of a straw, when into one cup all his doubts, speculations, and purposes were strained at last—the cup of fatalism, from which he had drunk deep at birth, in his rearing, from the grim mountains that had cradled him—the draught that gave him his strength and drove him forward when, without it, he would have shrunk back and would have passed from the earth to count for little more on the stage of action than the daily shadow of Black Rock to and fro across the Cumberland. What is to be, will be. He was not to blame that his ways were not the ways of his people; his aspirations were not his own—whence they came, God only knew. He had not striven to gain Anne Bruce's favor. He had not asked to take another place than the place to which he was born. He had asked nothing of friend or foe, and he had nothing to ask now. Fate had put him where he was; fate might take him out: very well, he would go. And whether he went or stayed, he would do his duty just the same. Such was his final thought; and no man ever watched for the gleam that flashes from within as Boone Stallard hearkened to the inner

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voice that had but to whisper to be obeyed. The people wanted him to go back to the capital; very well, he would go back. That was what he told the Stallards at the court-house one Saturday afternoon, and when he started for home, his brain swam with the thought of what must come. Responsibility had ceased for him—it was fate pointing the way beyond where he had dared to go. There was no turning back, then, when a little later came the crisis in his mountain life. Mace Keaton appeared one morning against the express terms of the truce—drunk and defiant. More, a little later he announced himself as a candidate to oppose Boone Stallard; more still, day by day the startling rumor that the Keatons meant to uphold his return and support his claim crystallized into certain fact. There was no doubt that Mace Keaton was acting from bitter personal hatred of Boone, and the Stallard leaders watched the latter closely and with fear. Always he had steered his course clear of the bloody run of feudal feeling. His acceptance of the nomination meant open enmity to the Keatons, open arrayal with them; it would make him the Stallard leader for the years to come. And they knew that he knew the penalty of his choice. Apparently he took no time to make up his mind. Straight and clear came his answer at once—he would run: the Stallards

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wanted him; Mace Keaton had violated the bond and so had his friends; the one had no right there—his friends no right to stand by him when he was plainly in the wrong.

It was a jubilee for the Stallards—this dictum. And all at once the burden of leadership, the responsibility of it, and the terrible risk were shifted in a day from shoulders that had long borne them—to shoulders that had been well trained by other burdens to take on more—if more had to be borne. The truce not to take up arms held; and the Keatons felt honor bound to keep the more rigidly to it in other particulars, having so grossly violated it in one. So the conflict began peaceably enough. But the convention was to come, and nobody had a doubt as to what that would bring to pass. Boone Stallard was in the feud at last.

XII

CHRISTMAS passed and the time was nigh. The House was open; new matting had been laid; there were divans in the lobbies; the cloak-rooms and the library were fresh and clean and the flags were newly furled. In the Lower House a good-looking mulatto was tacking to the desks cards that bore the members' names. A portrait of Washington hung above the dingy gold eagle on the Speaker's chair. To his right Daniel Boone sat on a log in a sylvan bower, cocking his rifle—with a vista, cut by the artist, through thick woods to the placid Ohio. To the left was Lafayette, hat in hand, and strolling near a cliff that his preoccupation made perilous. Each picture was ticketed, perhaps to save unwary rustics the mortification that the memories of innocent questions would later bring. A few old members were writing in their seats. A pompous new one was walking around his desk, looking at his own name openly once, then furtively again and again.

Passing the Senate door, one saw the tall portrait of the great Commoner, his face smiling

but imperious. Visitors were coming up and going down the oval stone stairway. Out on the steps was a " lady candidate " for librarian, with an imitation seal-skin thrown back and a bunch of carnations at her breast—smiling up into the flattered eyes of a very old statesman. Pushing a wheelbarrow toward the old iron gate was a trusty in stripes—a sullen fellow with a heavy jaw and a disfigured face. Over in the gray hotel of Kentucky marble, a crowd of tobacco-chewing politicians were wrangling about the Speakership for the coming term. The parlor was full of their wives and children. Outside, the day was clear, cloudless, brilliant, and warm, though along the road the moss was sprinkled with snow, and the hollows in the black haystacks out in the brown fields were plump and white. Out there the hazels, like the trees, were bending from the west—bent by the wind that blows ever from the sun. The far distance was hazy, dreamlike, reminiscent, and the mood of the horizon caught Anne when she turned with Katherine, on the hill, to look at the yellow western light, and held her while she walked back to the smoky town. Marshall was back; so was Stallard. No opponent dared to face Marshall in his own party, and the conflict in his county of rock-ribbed democracy was always, for the other side, a matter merely of form. So far

there had never been any need for him to take a thought for his political morrow, and, as usual, he stayed quietly at home, and passed, as usual, into his honors without opposition.

It was Colton who had told her about Stallard. He had got the story from Jack Mockaby, a mountain member who had been at the convention in Roland. Stallard stormed through the little court-house like a mad lion, shaking his finger in Mace Keaton's face, defying him and his clan; and the magnificent audacity of the performance so dazed his adversaries that they finally led Keaton from the court-house and left the nomination to Stallard, at the cost of a lifetime of peace, at the cost some day of his life, maybe. He was openly the leader of the Stallards now. Pistols were drawn that day after the Keatons came out from the spell of Stallard's cyclonic oratory, and it was all but necessary for Boone to take up a gun, for the first time in his life, against his fellow-man. At the last moment, Stallard had even been in doubt about leaving home for the capital, questioning whether his duty were at one place or the other. Any day he might need to go back to a mortal conflict; and then, in the words of the mountain member which were familiar in Anne's memory, "there'd be Billy-hell to pay when he did." Marshall knew all this, and already it was plain

that he and Stallard would be contestants for the Speakership. The old fight for disruption would surely come up again, and before Anne's eyes was nowhere the light of peace. It was a strange wrench from the placid run of her own life—to have her sympathies drawn into such a current of mediæval barbarism. There had been a great deal in the papers about the feud; about the people who took part in it; the method of warfare—ambushing from behind trees, lying in wait along the roadside, calling men to their own doors and shooting them down; worse still, cowards who had a little money paying assassins a petty sum to do their bloody work. Usually, it was said, one faction of the two rarely resorted to these means, and in this feud the Stallards had kept aloof from such hideous practices. That helped check Anne's growing horror, but it was incredible barbarism, and when she went back to the Mansion there appeared, as if to clinch the truth of what she had read, the only figure she had ever seen that might embody such evil. The warden would send over another trusty to take young Buck's place, her father said, and next morning she saw at the gate the sinister face of the convict with the sunken cheek, and Anne was transfixed. He, too, was a mountaineer. Stallard was one possibility of that life—here was

another. She had the man told that there was nothing for him to do; and it was on her lips to ask her father then and there just what young Buck had done, but her delicate honor forbade—that, Stallard was going to tell her. Why, she asked herself, passionately, did he not wrench loose wholly from such a life and from such people? Already he had answered the question—without cowardice and disloyalty he could not. It was not till then that she fully realized the mountaineer's strange predicament: his duty lay where he was; and if he could shake himself free, what then? The instincts that go with birth, the traits of character that grow with the training of childhood, the graces and culture that come with later associations, could never be his. Without them he would always be at a conscious disadvantage, and his pride would allow him no peace. For there was nothing in Stallard of that lurking hatred of the born gentleman, which she had noticed in other self-made men: the bitter jealousy of him, the contemptuous disparagement of his high claims and exactions. The mountaineer's bitterness was that he had not had the chance to be and to become all that was possible for a man. He was doing his best to make good what had been denied him; he would always do that. But meanwhile—with lips sealed for some reason—he was as helpless in the web of circum-

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stance as a fly in a spider's toils; and it was his own strength that bound him.

Stallard had not come to see her; she did not know that he would come, even if he were not so busy—if the stress of affairs were not so great. Both the men she had seen but once. She was standing on the steps of the Mansion when Marshall appeared on the other side of the street. She expected him to lift his hat and pass on, but, to her surprise, he had come across and shaken hands with fine control, and had asked that he might have a long talk with her soon. The days of thought and settled purpose had wrought their story that summer in his face, which was brown, ruddy, and firm. Some change had taken place in him which made her wonder; and some change had come over Stallard. Him she had seen from the drawing-room window. He, too, was passing by in deep thought, and the sight of his face choked her—so lean and worn was it. It had a hunted and wary look—Colton had spoken to her of that—the look of a man ever at high tension, on constant guard against an enemy, on guard for his life.

To everybody, the change in both was quickly apparent. Marshall had come back with the purpose of being considerate, temperate, and just. Stallard's timidity was gone. He had taken on a new front, he was aggressive at the start, and

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Marshall, to his surprise and vexation, found himself where he had always held Stallard—on the defensive. On the morning of the first day in the caucus, to decide certain preliminary matters, Marshall's hot temper flared up, and there was a lightning cross-fire between the two men. It was as plain as noonday that a clash would come. Marshall had become a little unpopular; his haughtiness offended some and his wealth others; some were jealous of him. These, with the following upon which Stallard could count, were enough to make the contest of grave doubt to Marshall's friends, and the situation did not help Marshall, who brooked such rivalry with little tolerance and little grace.

It was an old tale for that day, and one not impossible now. At first, Stallard declined to arm himself, though Mockaby told him to his face that he was a fool to go unarmed. Neither meant to make an attack; both believed an attack possible; both used the plea of self-defence; and when, at the afternoon session, the lie all but passed, each man went armed the next day, and the close friends of each were in an unrest of expectancy. And on that day Anne's life began to be a melodrama which she would have ridiculed had it passed before her on the stage. At noon she heard that trouble was likely, and her father had told her that ladies would not be al-

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lowed to enter the house that afternoon. So she stayed at home and, as women must, lay in a dark room with dry eyes and nothing to do but fear and think.

Meanwhile Marshall had spoken once, briefly and bitterly. Stallard replied briefly in kind, but with a cool moderation that inflamed Marshall more than bitterness could. As Marshall arose again, a messenger-boy laid a telegram on the mountaineer's desk. Colton saw him start, quickly break open the yellow envelope—and then saw every particle of color leave his face. There was but one answer for Stallard when Marshall sat down, and had the listeners been forced to sit still, while a bolt of lightning played under the ceiling, the face of every man could hardly have been more intense, nor would Marshall's, had he known that it was he whom the bolt would strike. There was but one answer to Stallard, too, and Marshall's white silence was an omen that the answer was sure to come. He went out before the session was quite over, and Mockaby, preceding Stallard a step, saw him waiting near one of the gray pillars at the far end of the portico, and gave the mountaineer a nod of warning. Stallard purposely walked toward the other end, and as he stepped down on the brick flagging, Marshall stepped down, too, facing him. Men near each of them scurried

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quickly out of line. The members coming out stopped still about the pillars, and Marshall's voice cut clearly through the sudden quiet.

"Stallard," he called, reaching for his pistol, "we'd as well settle this thing now."

Stallard saw the movement and, mountaineer-like, thought Marshall meant to get the advantage. Like lightning his own weapon flashed, and the two reports struck Mockaby's ear as one. It was hasty work, and both missed. Marshall's revolver spoke again, as he fired, advancing. Stallard hitched one shoulder slightly, and, to Mockaby's terror, looked down at his pistol, his face unmoved. Hearing no other shot, he looked up again quickly, and stood motionless and bewildered, staring at Marshall. Mockaby, too, was staring helplessly; for Marshall, seeing the trouble with the mountaineer's pistol, was quietly waiting for him to get ready again.

Stallard reddened and looked shamed; then, with a turn of his wrist, he tossed his weapon aside. It rang on the flagging at Mockaby's feet, and Mockaby stooped mechanically to pick it up. When he rose upright, he saw Stallard striding toward Marshall with his hand outstretched. Promptly Marshall stepped forward to meet him, shifting his pistol as he came, and midway, the two men caught hands. It was too much for the on-lookers: the strain of mortal ex-



He tossed his weapon aside.

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pectancy; the gallant magnanimity of the one, the perfect courage of the other. Mockaby was struck dumb, but a hum of enthusiasm rose behind him. One old Confederate, who had stood at rigid attention against a pillar, was wiping his eyes, and his mouth was twitching; and, as Stallard walked toward the gate, a policeman held it open for him, and touched his corded slouch hat as the mountaineer passed through.

An hour later, he was at the post-office eagerly breaking the seal of a letter from home. He read it once, and, leaning against the railing, read it again, with his face quite expressionless. Then he took his hat off and walked bareheaded up the street. The warning clang of a coming train brought him sharply up as he started across the track, and, reaching for his watch, he found his hat still in his hand. With a shake of his shoulders, he hurried to the Governor's office.

In a little while he came out again with a set face and started for his room. At the steps of the Mansion he looked at his watch for the third time on his way that far, and with the hesitation of a moment rang the bell. He told the negro girl who opened the door to say to her mistress that he was going away, and had only a minute in which to say good-by. The girl shrank from him, and Anne, who happened to be starting down-stairs, could not tell what he said, and

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hardly knew his voice. Coming in from the strong light so suddenly, he did not see her; so, with a nod to the servant, she let him pass into the drawing-room without calling to him, and stopped an instant at the foot of the stairs, her clasp tightening on the banisters. She had just heard of the all but mortal meeting of the two men—her eyes were still wet with tears of relief. Marshall had just sent her word that he was coming to the Mansion in an hour, and she was wondering why. Why was Stallard here?

The mountaineer had not sat down when she passed in. He was at the window, and he heard her coming and turned quickly. He did not offer to shake hands—he made no greeting, but stood silent, his body swaying slightly, as it did when he was greatly moved, and he looked as he looked the first time she saw him in the State House, and Anne felt the warning flutter of some new terror and steeled herself.

"I'm going home to-night," he said. "I may not come back very soon . . . I may not come back at all. And I've come to tell you good-by. It's come down in the mountains. They've killed two of my cousins. They've sent me word"—the curious little zigzag streaks of red began to run up and down his cheeks when he stopped to gain self-control—"that they will sell my mother's cattle, and—and hire out my

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sister. Your father says he can't help me. So it all depends on me, and I'm going to-night—in an hour. I don't know that I'll get back . . . the chances are that I shan't . . . so there's no need yet to tell you the one thing that I've kept from you . . . that I've kept from everybody . . . here. I shall tell it, if I come back; and then, if you can forgive that, I may have something to ask you. I can't speak the words now, and how I shall ever dare to say them, I don't know. I am crazy now, I think . . . but you know, you *must* know. I am helpless before you—like a child. You have been very good to me, and I have told you all but one thing. I've kept that back . . . from everybody . . . but I shall tell it . . . to you. I'm going now. I've given my word to the people there, and I'm going to keep it. You are the one person on earth to me . . . besides my mother and sister . . . the rest of the world is nothing . . . and if you can forgive one thing more, as you have forgiven so much, I . . . I shall make myself worthy. How I shall work for that. Good-by . . . if I don't come back . . . you will know why . . . good-by."

Already he was starting for the door, while the girl stood silent, cold, white. To save her soul she could not utter a word, and, like a statue, she watched him leave with a broken "God bless

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you " that gave her a throb of pain to hear. She heard the door close, his heavy tread across the porch, and she followed, opening the door and looking down the street where he had disappeared. She saw a figure coming toward her, but not until it had halted at the bottom of the steps was she aware that it was Marshall, smiling up at her. It was surprising that he should appear just at that moment; she had forgotten that he was to come, though she still held his note in her hand. She saw a keen, curious look flit through his eyes, and she felt the rush of tears on her face. Then her father spoke from the corner of the steps below—she had not seen him at all.

" You will win to-morrow," he said to Marshall. " Your rival has fled. There's trouble in Roland, and Stallard came to me for soldiers. Of course I couldn't help him—nor could I help approving his plan to take the matter in hand himself. I don't blame him. It looks pretty serious—Why, Anne! "

Then all at once Marshall seemed to understand; for an instant Anne helplessly met his sharp, straight gaze, and before she could speak, he was lifting his hat and turning away. She started indoors then, swerving slightly, and her father caught her arm, thinking that she had tripped on something and was about to fall.

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Stallard did not appear in the House next morning. Just before the vote for Speaker was cast the chairman read to the astonished members the withdrawal from the race, for reasons to be hereafter explained, of the member from Roland. There was not a vote against Marshall, and next day the papers made public the reason of Stallard's absence. Mace Keaton had control of Roland with his faction, and was in open defiance. Stallard had sent in to the Governor his resignation from the House, and had then gone down to make good his word that his people could take care of themselves. A desperate fight was imminent any hour.

XIII

TO meet death a rat goes to his hole, a lion to his lair; the same instinct, perhaps, in the shadow of a lesser crisis even, sends a man home. Marshall took the train with Anne's face still haunting him like the face of the dead. Chance had rent the veil, and he had turned away, as he would have turned had chance as suddenly bared the girl's breast as it had seemed to bare her soul. The stupefying calm that held him broke slowly as the train rushed through the winter fields; and slowly his hold on himself began to loosen. By the time he was climbing into his buggy he was asking himself fiercely what the use of it all was; and, a moment later, he pulled his mare to her haunches before his club door, in answer to an old voice within him that had been still for a long while. He had always stopped there in the old days, and it was the habit of resisting the impulse since those days, perhaps, that made him suddenly lash his horse on now. The mare sprang ahead with a frightened snort, and Marshall, with a half-curse on himself for his thoughtless cruelty, called

kindly to her several times to make recompense. Then he settled back into his big coat, and, a little later, he was on the white turnpike again speeding home, with his chin on his breast and the same fight in his soul that was there on that other drive, when Stallard first came into his life and into Anne's. Only the yellow evening light was almost gone now. There was not a bird-note from the darkening brown fields. The sun was a sullen blotch of fire when he reached his gate, and the woods behind the house were black and still. But his mother was waiting for him, and he was very tender with her that night. She knew something was wrong—she always knew; but she waited for him to tell, as she always did; and there were things that he had never told and could never tell, which she never knew nor guessed; and he was grateful, whatever the shame her faith and his weakness brought to him. The pantry door was open when he went to his room, but there was no glisten of glassware from within. That temptation had been removed long ago, and it was well for him that night that it was. His room was cold; the white moon through the window looked cold, and the dead fields and the gaunt moonlit woods. The whole world was cold, and every riotous drop in the veins of his reckless forefathers was running wild in his, when he went sleepless to bed and to an

all-night struggle that sent him groping back through his past for the things that were the stay of his unthinking childhood. For the first time in years, he was ready to go with his mother to church next morning when the carriage drove before the door. It was a sign to her of some unusual distress of mind, and a grateful surprise that she was too wise to show. Instinctively she took him to the old country church where she used to take him when he was a boy; and, going and coming, the little school-house where he and Anne had been playmates gave him a sharp pang; but the old church that had brought its sturdy walls and sturdy faith down from the pioneers, the saddle-horses hitched to the plank fence, the long stiles, with the country girls dismounting in their long black skirts, the atmosphere of reverence, the droning old hymns—all helped little by little to draw him back to the faith from which he had started adrift; to stir memories that were good for him, and to make easier what was to come. From church, several neighbors went home with them to dinner, after a custom of the neighborhood; and it was after they were gone that a negro boy brought the morning paper to Marshall's room. He opened it, and read one paragraph on the first page twice—then he threw the paper on the table and rose. It was a terse telegram from Stallard to the Gov-

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ernor. The fight was over, and Stallard was safe and successful. And he was coming back. Marshall's acceptance of the fact and its probable significance was quick, proud, and fiery. Only he picked up his hat and got quickly out into the open air. His mother was in the front yard, and he did not want to see her quite yet; so he went into the parlor, where a fire was still burning, and sat down by the window—forestalling the days that were at hand. He was before Anne now, paying her his tribute to Stallard; and from the depths of his unworthy satire rose the bitter fact that what he was saying to himself, and mentally to Anne, was literal truth—the mountaineer *was* worthy. And with this realization, he suddenly lost the power to feel the thousand subtleties that he had always believed would prevent Anne from joining her life to Stallard's, no matter what her admiration for him, her respect, her pity, or even her love.

Then, for the first time in his life, jealousy started throbbing through him, and he knew the hell of two passions fighting his soul at once. It stretched him out on the sofa where he sat, and he lay there a long time, dully watching the evening sunlight as it rose slowly to the face of his boyish uncle on the wall, whose life and death was a tragedy that seemed meant for him to play again. He looked with a deeper sympathy

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now behind the smiling lips and the reckless, smiling eyes, and with a throb of pity for him which was half for himself, he hurried out into the woods and the dusk.

It was startling to realize that nothing, not even religion nor his mother, had governed his life as had his love of Anne. Without her, it seemed that he must lose anchor and go adrift. And once, in the night, sick with fever and mad for a little relief, he sprang from his bed to take his buggy and go back to town and lose himself in the old way. This time it was the swift vision of his mother's face that stopped him in the middle of the floor—his duty was to her now—and forced him in an agony of helplessness to his knees in the first prayer that had been wrung from him in years. That was his crucial hour, and he faced the morning, grateful; but he stayed at home that day through distrust of himself—and to keep away from the capital.

Life had almost begun anew for him a year ago; he believed now that, without Anne, it must begin quite new. It was like walking back into childhood when he started out after breakfast on foot, and every memory was a healing comfort. When he passed the spring-house, the geese raised their wings with a reedy cackling and, with the ducks, went swinging down the riffles, as though they yet expected him to throw

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pebbles at them. At the stone fence, beyond, he stopped to look at the water bubbling over the water-gap, through which he used to drop his hook for perch and catfish. Then he followed the winding branch by a pig-path, through the thickly matted long grass, that was criss-crossed by tiny, beaten roads that used to lead many a musk-rat to death in his traps. A hawk was sweeping the field with his wings, hovering close to the grass in his hunt for a breakfast of mice. The old impulse came to run back to the house for his gun, and the gray bird swerved like a glancing arrow to safety on a dead tree far out in the meadow. Up in the sun, the hill-side was covered with sheep. A ewe with one white lamb was lapping water at the grassy edge of the creek. Just to one side of the path lay another—its twin, no doubt—dead and mutilated, and across the creek hung its murderer, a robber crow, dangling by its wings from a low limb, with his penitent beak between his feet.

He was not the only thing on earth that had to suffer. Life was a chain of suffering, with nature at one end and nature at the other; a pyramid of cruelty with man at the apex exacting the tribute of sacrifice from below, paying it right and left to the strong, and above to the unseen. He must take his share. There were other motives to action in life than love, than duty to his mother

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—the duty to those of whom he had not thought much, and of whom suffering was teaching him to think now: others than himself—his duty to the world around, above and below. He might have drawn tears from an audience on that theme once with his tongue and his brain: it was sinking to his heart now.

Anne was right; he had made a wretched use of himself. He had been weak and reckless, and wasteful of the time, energy, and the talents, whatever they were, that God had given him. He had made of his love a moping luxury instead of a motive to deeds that were worth doing; he was selfish and degenerate. He loved his State, he thought, and he was intensely proud of it and of his people. Yet there was Stallard fighting like a savage on its border—that was a stain; and there was he provoking the same man to a deadly conflict at the very seat of order and law. Where was the difference, except that the mountaineer, as he claimed, had the better right to fight in the one place and, as Marshall admitted, the better excuse in the other. It was hypocrisy for him to blame Stallard and to justify himself. Courage was a passionate ideal in him, as it is in his people. Human life was worth less, he believed, and was proud that his State believed, and would not have it otherwise, than certain old-fashioned ideals that were still all-powerful;

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but was it not possible to lift life and yet not lower those ideals at all? That was something he might have helped to do. Once, a political career was an honored one. He could help bring the honor of it back. There were consolations, too—the thrill of power as a speaker, the exhilaration of conflict, the pride in a good cause—ah! there was much left in the world, even after love was gone out.

All these years it had taken him to realize simple facts about which he had thundered with such confidence in college; and now, far out in the woods, he lay on a stone wall in the warm sun, taking in the comfort of his discovery, until the mellow tone of the dinner-bell rang noon across the fields. From everywhere came answering shouts from the darkies at work; and when he climbed the yard fence going home he could hear the jingling traces of the plough-horses crowding into the barn-yard, and the laughing banter of the darkies about the white-washed cabins. It was all very busy and peaceful and comforting, and it was his to have day after day, when he pleased.

And so, that afternoon, it seemed a bigger and a kindlier world when he started out again through the winter blue-grass, past the white tobacco-barn, past the spring in the woods, gushing from under a rock over rich, bent grass, May-

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green; on over brown turf and under gray woods to the "field" where the breakers were at work. How he would fool the birds that croaked evil of him! All over the hill-side the hemp lay in shining swaths. Two darkies were picking it up with wooden hooks; another was working at a brake, which, at that distance, looked absurdly like a big doll-baby with tow-linen skirts blowing in the wind. The rest were idling about a fire of hurds. The overseer stood near with his hand outstretched, as though he were arguing. He was having trouble of some kind, for but one other negro was at work, an old fellow with gray whiskers, thick lips, and a striped over-suit of cotton. Nobody could hear Marshall's tread on the thick turf.

"Hemp gone down, boys," the overseer was saying. "Can't pay you more—sorry. If you don't like the price, you needn't work. Nobody's feelin's hurt. Brakes won't go beggin'."

The old darky picked on. The brawny breaker swooped up a fresh armful with his left hand, and, with his right, brought the heavy upper swords crackling down on the stiff stalks until his figure was lost in a gray cloud of hurds.

"Dat's right," said one of the idlers. "I ain't gwine to wuck."

"All right," said the overseer. "Hit the pike. Nobody's feelin's hurt. Brakes won't go

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beggin'. Could 'a' got hands in town yesterday, but wanted to give you boys a chance. Hit the pike."

The man at the brake seemed not to hear. His hemp had got bright and flexible, and it sank like folds of iron-gray hair down through the lower swords, which were smooth, shining, and curved like the throat of a harp. The idlers had all started from the fire, but only one reached the fence at the pike, and he turned on the top rail and looked back. Slowly, one after another, the men were going to work. It was Marshall's own orders that the shrewd overseer had given the simple negroes. There was another thing that he might have done than cut their wages down—he could have taken less profit for himself—and he did that now.

"Give them the old price," he called, in a low voice, but they heard, and a row of white teeth shone in every black face. It was to him like light to darkness—that grateful flash. It helped the deeps to open as he turned away. Love was not everything. All day that fact had beat in on him persistently, and it was strange that never once came with it the suspicion that Anne too might know that, with a man, love should not be everything; that she might be generous enough to accept the fact; unselfish enough to exact it of him; that his love for her was a weakness that

kept her from perfect respect for him as long as it kept him from paying the debt that he owed to his State, his name, and to himself; and that, being a goal in itself, her love might lose value when he had gained it. Stallard was coming back. Until Anne should open her lips, it was no more his business than if he had never known her. Again and again the thought had forced itself on him, with some bitterness, that she had not been altogether just and frank. Now he straightway gave her absolution. Women did not understand friendship as men did; besides both were not friends—he was a lover. She may not have wanted to pain him. The flash may have come to her as to him from a clear sky. But it had come, and his way was straight, and it led him into a calm that was like the quiet sunset that he faced, turning homeward.

Away off in the east, across the gently concave sky, some little blue clouds had begun to turn golden. The air had grown cold and the shadows long. The crows were coming home to roost; there was a line of black specks across the low, even band of yellow that lay across the west like a stubble wheat-field at noon. Against this the trees, with trunks invisible, were set bright, sharp, and clear; and when he reached the brow of a low hill he saw, black and distinct against the after-glow, the last of the many pictures that

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were etched on his brain that day to stay—the dim, sloping barn, the black cedars with one light shining through them, and, above, the roof that sheltered his mother, his father's memory, and a name of which, henceforth, please God, he should make himself worthy.

At once he put his purpose to a bitter test, when he reached the darkened house, by going upstairs and straight to his book of memories. And there, in the dusk, he tore out the leaves one by one and heaped them in the grate. Then he set them afire and left the room that he might not see them burn.

The blaze lit up the room and showed the picture of Anne on the mantel—in white muslin, with a blue ribbon about her throat and a Leghorn hat in her lap. It showed, too, the paper on the table, where Marshall had thrown it the day before, and by the light one could have read Stallard's message to the Governor—it was as laconic as Cæsar's:

“ I told you I should retake my fireside. It's done.”

XIV

COLTON himself had gone to the scene of the conflict, and, on the second day, the people in the capital read the story of the fight: and nothing was lost to it, nor to Stallard, in the telling. Colton had got the mountaineer's terse message to the Governor, and the ring of it and the passion for analogy spun the story around a circuit that made Stallard notorious. The mountaineer had led his law-and-order party into the town, as a sheriff's posse, at daybreak. At that hour the sheriff disappeared and Stallard alone was in command. His coolness, witnesses said, was extraordinary. One man had seen him stop shooting in the heat of the fight, deliberately touch the muzzle of his Winchester to the ground, and, while two Keatons were cross-firing at him, deliberately resume again. He was nervous, he explained afterward, having been without sleep and on an intense strain for forty-eight hours, and he had been told that, in a fight, it would calm a man simply to touch his gun to the earth. Evidently it did calm him, for at his first shot thereafter a Keaton dropped to the ground

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with a broken shoulder. Mace Keaton and three others would give no further trouble, Colton concluded; and, indeed, the feud in that county was done. The intimidated were plucking up heart, and the good men of the county were taking Stallard's part. Several ringleaders had been arrested, and would be sent to the blue-grass for trial. Boone Stallard had made his word good.

That afternoon Marshall asked that his old bill for disruption be voted down, gave Stallard a eulogy, and went home, half ill. The House entered a unanimous protest against the mountaineer's resignation of his seat, though Colton had written that Stallard would return to the capital for only a few days, and would go back, then, where he was needed—home.

A week later, Marshall and the mountaineer reached the capital on the same day. As the purpose of both was the same, it was not unnatural that, when Marshall came to see Anne in the afternoon, she should have just received a note from Stallard, asking if he could come that night. She was in the haze of great mental distress when Marshall's name was brought to her; she was stifling for the open air, and the day was a sunny promise of spring—a day that may stand sharply out in any season as a forecast of the next to come. So Anne came down dressed for a walk, and it was a trick of the fate whose hand

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seemed ever at Stallard's throat that led the three together on the hill. As they passed through the old bridge they met several people driving—so warm was the air—and when they turned off from the river, Anne directed Marshall's attention up the hill and smiled.

"I'm not as freakish as you might think," she said.

Colton and Katherine were far above them, walking slowly, and when they reached the curve of the road, Colton was waving at them from the other end of the segment and close to the crest of the hill. Twice he pointed significantly toward the road below him, and, in a moment, Anne saw why. Stallard's tall figure was moving slowly up the pike, with his hands clasped behind him, and his head bent far over. The gate at the oak-tree was opposite, and Anne turned toward it from the road. Marshall, seeing Stallard just then, knew why, and turned, too, without a word. Had a thunder-cloud swept suddenly over the sun, the day could not have been more swiftly darkened for both; for Anne's silent recoil was to Marshall another surprised confession, however vague, and had Anne but glanced at him she would have known that with him, too, a decisive moment was at hand. She could not help looking back, even after she had passed through the gate and was following Marshall up the path.

The mountaineer had turned, and was walking down the road, his figure unchanged. While she looked, he slowly turned again, as though he were pacing to and fro, waiting for some one. He looked weak and he looked wretched, and the girl's breath came hard. The mountaineer had come back to tell her what she already knew, that Buck, the young trusty who had worked in her garden, was the brother of whom he had spoken, and to ask her—what? And what should she say? It was plain now—his course from the beginning: his struggle with his duty to his people, his temptation to hide from the world the one thing that he had left untold to her. If she forgave that—and she had—he meant to ask her—she well knew what—and what should she say? What could she say? For days she had not been able to think of anything else—she could think of nothing else now. The horror of it all had swept freshly over her after the relief of Stallard's safety came—horror at what he had done, though she knew she would have despised him had he even hesitated doing it; horror at the life with which he was so mercilessly linked, of which she knew so little, and from which she was beginning to shrink as she shrank from the terrible convict who typified to her all the evil she had heard, and was the one distinct figure in the awful dark-

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ness of which she dreamed. And yet, one by one, the barriers that would have made Stallard's question absurd a year ago had slowly fallen until now it troubled her as nothing else of the kind ever had. Never had love in another man thrilled her as it thrilled her in Stallard—that much was sure. She had for him perfect respect, high admiration, deep pity—what else more she did not know.

It was odd that Marshall should stop at the same tree where she and Stallard had stopped nearly a year before; that she should sit quite mechanically on the same root where she had sat before; odd that he should lie where Stallard had lain. The contrast was marked now between the clean, graceful figure stretched easily on the sun-warmed, yellow grass and the loose, powerful bulk of the mountaineer. She remembered Stallard's unshorn head, looking now at Marshall's carefully kept brown hair. The sunlight showed its slight tendency to crinkle; she had always hated that, but no more, she knew, than did he. It was odd that so slight a thing should so worry her now. The faces of both were smooth, and, to Anne's searching insight, the life of both was written plain, except for one dark spot from which, in each, she shrank. It had kept her from fully trusting one; it had held her sometimes in an unaccountable dread of the

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other. Marshall was not gaining ground as he lay there with his hat tilted over his eyes and a blade of withered grass between his teeth—easy, indolent, an image to her of wasting power—for Anne was thinking of Stallard down in the road, and it was well for him that he began to speak. No woman could listen with indifference to a voice that was so rich and low; that told all the good in him and none of the evil.

“Anne,” he said, and the girl raised her head quickly. She could hardly remember when he had called her by her first name, and the tone of his voice was new. “Anne,” he repeated, with a firm note of possession, as it seemed to her, that made her pulse with sudden resentment, “I am done now.”

His tone was almost harsh, and he was not looking at her, but at a vivid patch of young wheat that glanced like an emerald on the brown top of a distant sunlit hill. And Anne, looking hard at him, saw again the change that the summer had brought. The fieriness was gone from him, and the old, impetuous way of breaking into a torrent of words, and as suddenly breaking off in a useless effort to frame thought and feeling. He looked as calm as a young monk she had once seen at Gethsemane—as calm as though his peace, too, was made for earth as well as heaven.

“Let me see. It must have been ten years

ago. It was coming home through the woods from the old school-house. I had a red welt on my forehead. I told you I had got it playing town-ball—that was not true. I got it fighting about you. It was Indian summer, I recollect that, and sunset—you remember, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, wonderingly and almost gently; but she was thinking, too, of Stallard going up and down the road—he looked lonely.

"I asked you to be my sweetheart, and I was just sixteen." Marshall might have been repeating words that had been carefully prepared, so finished were his sentences, so dramatic the quality of them, "and you said 'yes'; yes, you said 'yes'; and that was ten years ago, and I have never loved another woman since. I have made no pretence of loving another; or of not loving one. When I came home from college, something had happened, and you began to say 'no'; but I kept on loving you just the same—and you kept on saying 'no.' I am doing the one thing now, and you are still doing the other. Ten years! That gives me some rights, little as I may otherwise deserve them, doesn't it, Anne?" The voice was doing good work now.

"Yes, Rannie," she said, and she had never called him by that name since he went away to school; but if he noticed it, he gave no sign. The green on the hill-top still held his eyes, and

for a moment he said nothing. The sunlight was very rich for midwinter, as rich as though it had been sifted through gold-dust somewhere. It seemed palpable enough to grasp with the hand across the running water that was making it pulse in quivering circles along bush and tree. It foretold an early spring, and made Anne think of the shy green of young leaves and the gold of the same sunlight a year ago, and then of Stallard, through the soft, gray cloud of winter trees, walking up and down the road, waiting.

“I’m going to take them now. People inherit tendencies to go down.”

Anne turned to him again: he was speaking of himself, and he had never done that before but once.

“Everybody knows and remembers that. People may, at the same time, inherit the aspiration for better things and the strength to rise to them. Everybody seems to forget that, sometimes—even you. And yet you were right, and I haven’t a word of blame.”

Nor had he, she recalled quickly, that night after the dance, when, losing patience, she had broken out with her defence of Stallard. She remembered now the start her outburst gave him, the quick flush of his face, his quick restraint, and the steady quiet with which he had unflinchingly taken to heart the bitter truth she gave

him, and his courtesy to the end. She was too much aroused that night to care what pain she caused him, but the memory of it hurt her now.

"You have been hard, but you have not been unjust. I have been fighting a long time, and you might have given me a little more credit for the fight. I think you would have given me more, if you had cared more. Because you seemed not to care, I did not ask it. It was a weakness to want it . . . I don't need it now . . . whatever happens, I shall keep my own path just the same . . ."

Anne hardly took in what he was saying, his voice was so dispassionate. Marshall had always been generous, winning, faithful—that was what she was thinking. Why had she never loved *him*? It was as strange as that she should not know what it was she felt for Stallard.

"For I'm done now," repeated Marshall, inexorably. "I'm going to take my rights. I'm going to leave you altogether."

She heard now, and she turned, half dazed. Marshall was steeling himself against his own tenderness and going calmly on:

"When you want me, if you ever do, you must send for me. It is all, or nothing, I must have. And you must give it unasked now, if you should ever have it to give. Yes," he went on, as though to answer her unuttered cry of sur-

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prise and indignation . . . " I know your pride—your foolish, steely pride—but I'm done now."

Anne's eyes were wide with bewilderment. Was he gone crazy?

" I have loved you for ten years. I don't wonder at your distrust of me, but it's different now. Perhaps you don't yet trust me? In that event, I don't care how long a test you put upon me. Only, if by some miracle you should want me to come back, you will have no right to say, ' Maybe he has ceased to care for me now.' You will have no right to say that, even to yourself—to think it. I promise, if that ever happens, to come and tell you myself. I promise that. I have done all I can—all I should. The rest is with you now, wholly."

Marshall was rising. He had not looked at her since he began to talk—he had hardly dared for fear his purpose should fail him—and Anne rose too, as though he had bidden her.

" If you marry anybody else, I'll wait for him to die. You can't escape me in the end." He was smiling faintly, but his tone was almost rough, and Anne was ready both to laugh and to cry. " And I'll never come till you send for me. We'd better go now," he said, coolly, and he started down, Anne following, quite helpless, without a word, and with a growing sense of de-

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sertion that oppressed her and made her unconsciously look for Stallard when they emerged from the undergrowth. She was quite sure she would see him, and there he was, walking rapidly past the gate, but he did not seem to see them, so intent was he on something down the road. Her dress caught on a bush, as Marshall pulled back the gate, and, when he stooped to disentangle it, she heard the mountaineer's voice around a clump of bushes below them. Marshall rose quickly, and, the next moment, both heard what he was saying.

"No," he said, sternly. "I'll give you the money, but you must go back. I got you out, and I gave my word you wouldn't run away. You've *got* to go back."

A rough voice, strangely like his own to the girl's ears, answered something unintelligible.

"Then I'll take you back myself."

A low oath of rage and the shuffling of feet came through the bushes, and Marshall caught Anne's arm.

"You stay here," he said, firmly, and he hurried through the gate and around the bushes. Stallard was blocking the road against a rough-looking fellow, who started to run when he saw Marshall. Stallard caught him by the arm, and with the other hand the fellow struck the mountaineer a fearful blow in the face.

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"God, man!" shouted Marshall, indignantly; for, to his amazement, Stallard did not give back the blow but caught his assailant by the other wrist.

"Come here and help," he said. "This is an escaped convict."

Marshall ran forward, and the convict gave up and dropped stubbornly to the road, coughing hard, crying from rage, and cursing Stallard by his first name.

"You're a fine brother, hain't ye?" he repeated, with savage malice, starting another string of curses and stopping short, with his eyes fixed on something behind Stallard. The mountaineer wheeled. Anne was standing there, her face quite bloodless, and her eyes wide and full upon his.

"You heard what he said?"

It was the mountaineer's voice that broke at last through the awful silence, and in this test, even, it was steady.

"I know what you thought. This—this is my brother."

Anne's eyes turned slowly to the convict, who lay at Stallard's feet with his sunken cheek toward her; and slowly the truth forced its terrible way to her brain and then back again to Stallard in one look of unspeakable horror, unspeakable pity.

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"This was what I had to tell you," he said, quietly; but his face had whitened quickly, all but the red welt where the convict had struck. "I have nothing to ask—now." Not in voice or bearing was there the slightest reproach for her.

"Get up, Bud," he said, kindly. Anne turned for an instant to Marshall, when the convict rose, but it was a second rending of the veil for him, and he had moved away that he might not hear. Before the two could take a step, she was at the mountaineer's side.

"I . . . I'm—going with you!"

Marshall heard that and, but for his agitated face, Stallard's calm must have broken. For he understood, even then, what was beyond Marshall to know, and at that moment, perhaps, beyond Anne. She had struck into his heart when he was most helpless, and, to atone, she would walk with him through the streets of the town, back to the very walls of the prison, on through life even, if he asked. All this Stallard saw—and more—and he shook his head.

"God bless you!" he said. 101 101 101 "Come on, Bud!"

The two brothers started down the road toward town—and toward the shifting black column of smoke that rose over the gray prison beyond.

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A year later one of them, faithful to the end as the other's keeper, came to the capital to deliver his charge back to the Keeper of the things that die.

"If that had happened before——" said Katherine, questioningly; but Anne shook her head.

"Not that—not that," she said, sadly. "I don't know . . . I . . . " And there she stopped still.

A flood of development was at high tide in the mountains before another year was gone, and it seemed as though the prophecy of Stallard's first speech at the capital was coming true. His name was slowly radiating from the great capital then; and a year later still, Marshall rose as a senator of the State, and in a fervid piece of oratory, in which he was now without a rival, spoke for Boone Stallard for the Senate of the nation. Stallard was defeated; but when Katherine Colton, who was a guest at the Bruce homestead, told Anne of the quixotic fight that Marshall, to his own hurt, had made for the mountaineer, Anne let her head sink back out of the light into a shadow. Then Katherine, who knew how matters stood between the two, spoke sharply and with the authority that had lately come to her. As a result, a night or two afterward, a buggy creaked softly over the turf from the pike

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gate and a dark, active figure climbed the stiles. Katherine rose for flight.

"Please . . ." said Anne, ". . . not yet."

From an up-stairs window, Katherine saw the moon rising on the two at the gate, and on the gracious sweep of field, meadow, and woodland that had always been and would always be, perhaps, his home and hers. Lying all along the east, and hardly touched as yet by the coming light, was a bank of dark clouds, as mountainlike and full of mystery as though they were faithful shadows of the great Range behind and beyond—and Katherine's eyes filled. When she went to bed she could hear the voices of the two now and then on the porch below, until she fell asleep. She felt a pair of arms around her next, and a pair of lips at her ear.

"Katherine!"

"Yes?" she said, sleepily.

Anne kissed her.

A KNIGHT OF THE CUMBERLAND

I

THE BLIGHT IN THE HILLS

HIGH noon of a crisp October day, sunshine flooding the earth with the warmth and light of old wine and going single-file up through the jagged gap that the dripping of water has worn down through the Cumberland Mountains from crest to valley-level, a gray horse and two big mules, a man and two young girls. On the gray horse, I led the tortuous way. After me came my small sister—and after her and like her, mule-back, rode the Blight—dressed as she would be for a gallop in Central Park or to ride a hunter in a horse show.

I was taking them, according to promise, where the feet of other women than mountaineers had never trod—beyond the crest of the Big Black—to the waters of the Cumberland—the lair of moonshiner and feudsman, where is yet pocketed a civilization that, elsewhere, is long ago gone. This had been a pet dream of the Blight's for a long time, and now the dream was coming true. The Blight was in the hills.

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Nobody ever went to her mother's house without asking to see her even when she was a little thing with black hair, merry face and black eyes. Both men and women, with children of their own, have told me that she was, perhaps, the most fascinating child that ever lived. There be some who claim that she has never changed—and I am among them. She began early, regardless of age, sex or previous condition of servitude—she continues recklessly as she began—and none makes complaint. Thus was it in her own world—thus it was when she came to mine. On the way down from the North, the conductor's voice changed from a command to a request when he asked for her ticket. The jacketed lord of the dining-car saw her from afar and advanced to show her to a seat—that she might ride forward, sit next to a shaded window and be free from the glare of the sun on the other side. Two porters made a rush for her bag when she got off the car, and the proprietor of the little hotel in the little town where we had to wait several hours for the train into the mountains gave her the bridal chamber for an afternoon nap. From this little town to "The Gap" is the worst sixty-mile ride, perhaps, in the world. She sat in a dirty day-coach; the smoke rolled in at the windows and doors; the cars shook and swayed and lumbered around

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curves and down and up gorges; there were about her rough men, crying children, slatternly women, tobacco juice, peanuts, popcorn and apple cores, but dainty, serene and as merry as ever, she sat through that ride with a radiant smile, her keen black eyes noting everything unlovely within and the glory of hill, tree and chasm without. Next morning at home, where we rise early, no one was allowed to waken her and she had breakfast in bed—for the Blight's gentle tyranny was established on sight and varied not at the Gap.

When she went down the street that day everybody stared surreptitiously and with perfect respect, as her dainty black-plumed figure passed; the post-office clerk could barely bring himself to say that there was no letter for her. The soda-fountain boy nearly filled her glass with syrup before he saw that he was not strictly minding his own business; the clerk, when I bought chocolate for her, unblushingly added extra weight and, as we went back, she met them both—Marston, the young engineer from the North, crossing the street and, at the same moment, a drunken young tough with an infuriated face reeling in a run around the corner ahead of us as though he were being pursued. Now we have a volunteer police guard some forty strong at the Gap—and from habit, I started for him,

but the Blight caught my arm tight. The young engineer in three strides had reached the curbstone and all he sternly said was:

“Here! Here!”

The drunken youth wheeled and his right hand shot toward his hip pocket. The engineer was belted with a pistol, but with one lightning movement and an incredibly long reach, his right fist caught the fellow’s jaw so that he pitched backward and collapsed like an empty bag. Then the engineer caught sight of the Blight’s bewildered face, flushed, gripped his hands in front of him and simply stared. At last he saw me:

“Oh,” he said, “how do you do?” and he turned to his prisoner, but the panting sergeant and another policeman—also a volunteer—were already lifting him to his feet. I introduced the boy and the Blight then, and for the first time in my life I saw the Blight—shaken. Round-eyed, she merely gazed at him.

“That was pretty well done,” I said.

“Oh, he was drunk and I knew he would be slow.” Now something curious happened. The dazed prisoner was on his feet, and his captors were starting with him to the calaboose when he seemed suddenly to come to his senses.

“Jes wait a minute, will ye?” he said quietly, and his captors, thinking perhaps that he wanted

to say something to me, stopped. The mountain youth turned a strangely sobered face and fixed his blue eyes on the engineer as though he were searing every feature of that imperturbable young man in his brain forever. It was not a bad face, but the avenging hatred in it was fearful. Then he, too, saw the Blight, his face calmed magically and he, too, stared at her, and turned away with an oath checked at his lips. We went on—the Blight thrilled, for she had heard much of our volunteer force at the Gap and had seen something already. Presently I looked back. Prisoner and captors were climbing the little hill toward the calaboose and the mountain boy just then turned his head and I could swear that his eyes sought not the engineer, whom we left at the corner, but, like the engineer, he was looking at the Blight. Whereat I did not wonder—particularly as to the engineer. He had been in the mountains for a long time and I knew what this vision from home meant to him. He turned up at the house quite early that night.

“I’m not on duty until eleven,” he said hesitantly, “and I thought I’d——”

“Come right in.”

I asked him a few questions about business and then I left him and the Blight alone. When I came back she had a Gatling gun of eager

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questions ranged on him and—happy withal—he was squirming no little. I followed him to the gate.

“Are you really going over into those God-forsaken mountains?” he asked.

“I thought I would.”

“And you are going to take *her*?”

“And my sister.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon.” He strode away.

“Coming up by the mines?” he called back.

“Perhaps—will you show us around?”

“I guess I will,” he said emphatically, and he went on to risk his neck on a ten-mile ride along a mountain road in the dark.

“I *like* a man,” said the Blight. “I like a *man*.”

Of course the Blight must see everything, so she insisted on going to the police court next morning for the trial of the mountain boy. The boy was in the witness chair when we got there, and the Hon. Samuel Budd was his counsel. He had volunteered to defend the prisoner, I was soon told, and then I understood. The November election was not far off and the Hon. Samuel Budd was candidate for legislature. More even, the boy's father was a warm supporter of Mr. Budd and the boy himself might perhaps render good service in the cause when the time came—as indeed he did. On one of the front chairs

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sat the young engineer and it was a question whether he or the prisoner saw the Blight's black plumes first. The eyes of both flashed toward her simultaneously, the engineer colored perceptibly and the mountain boy stopped short in speech and his pallid face flushed with unmistakable shame. Then he went on: "He had liquered up," he said, "and had got tight afore he knowed it and he didn't mean no harm and had never been arrested afore in his whole life."

"Have you ever been drunk before?" asked the prosecuting attorney severely. The lad looked surprised.

"Co'se I have, but I ain't goin' to agin—leastwise not in this here town." There was a general laugh at this and the aged mayor rapped loudly.

"That will do," said the attorney.

The lad stepped down, hitched his chair slightly so that his back was to the Blight, sank down in it until his head rested on the back of the chair and crossed his legs. The Hon. Samuel Budd arose and the Blight looked at him with wonder. His long yellow hair was parted in the middle and brushed with plaster-like precision behind two enormous ears, he wore spectacles, gold-rimmed and with great staring lenses, and his face was smooth and ageless. He caressed his chin ruminatingly and rolled his lips

until they settled into a fine resultant of wisdom, patience, toleration and firmness. His manner was profound and his voice oily and soothing.

"May it please your Honor—my young friend frankly pleads guilty." He paused as though the majesty of the law could ask no more. "He is a young man of naturally high and somewhat—naturally, too, no doubt—bibulous spirits. Homœopathically—if inversely—the result was logical. In the untrammelled life of the liberty-breathing mountains, where the stern spirit of law and order, of which your Honor is the august symbol, does not prevail as it does here—thanks to your Honor's wise and just dispensations—the lad has, I may say, naturally acquired a certain recklessness of mood—indulgence which, however easily condoned there, must here be sternly rebuked. At the same time, he knew not the conditions here, he became exhilarated without malice, prepensey or even, I may say, consciousness. He would not have done as he has, if he had known what he knows now, and, knowing, he will not repeat the offence. I need say no more. I plead simply that your Honor will temper the justice that is only yours with the mercy that is yours—only."

His Honor was visibly affected and to cover it—his methods being informal—he said with sharp irrelevancy:

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"Who bailed this young feller out last night?" The sergeant spoke:

"Why, Mr. Marston thar"—with outstretched finger toward the young engineer. The Blight's black eyes leaped with exultant appreciation and the engineer turned crimson. His Honor rolled his quid around in his mouth once, and peered over his glasses:

"I fine this young feller two dollars and costs." The young fellow had turned slowly in his chair and his blue eyes blazed at the engineer with unappeasable hatred. I doubt if he had heard his Honor's voice.

"I want ye to know that I'm obleeged to ye an' I ain't a-goin' to fergit it; but if I'd 'a' known hit was you I'd 'a' stayed in jail an' seen you in hell afore I'd 'a' been bounden to ye."

"Ten dollars fer contempt of couht." The boy was hot now.

"Oh, fine and be——" The Hon. Samuel Budd had him by the shoulder, the boy swallowed his voice and his starting tears of rage, and after a whisper to his Honor, the Hon. Samuel led him out. Outside, the engineer laughed to the Blight:

"Pretty peppery, isn't he?" but the Blight said nothing, and later we saw the youth on a gray horse crossing the bridge and conducted by the Hon. Samuel Budd, who stopped and waved

him toward the mountains. The boy went on and across the plateau, the gray Gap swallowed him.

That night, at the post-office, the Hon. Sam plucked me aside by the sleeve.

“I know Marston is agin me in this race—but I’ll do him a good turn just the same. You tell him to watch out for that young fellow. He’s all right when he’s sober, but when he’s drunk—well, over in Kentucky, they call him the Wild Dog.”

Several days later we started out through that same Gap. The glum stableman looked at the Blight’s girths three times, and with my own eyes starting and my heart in my mouth, I saw her pass behind her sixteen-hand-high mule and give him a friendly tap on the rump as she went by. The beast gave an appreciative flop of one ear and that was all. Had I done that, any further benefit to me or mine would be incorporated in the terms of an insurance policy. So, stating this, I believe I state the limit and can now go on to say at last that it was because she seemed to be loved by man and brute alike that a big man of her own town, whose body, big as it was, was yet too small for his heart and from whose brain things went off at queer angles, always christened her perversely as—“The Blight.”



"If I'd a known hit was you I'd a stayed in jail."

II

ON THE WILD DOG'S TRAIL

SO up we went past Bee Rock, Preacher's Creek and Little Looney, past the mines where high on a "tipple" stood the young engineer looking down at us, and looking after the Blight as we passed on into a dim, rocky avenue walled on each side with rhododendrons. I waved at him and shook my head—we would see him coming back. Beyond a deserted log-cabin we turned up a spur of the mountain. Around a clump of bushes we came on a gray-bearded mountaineer holding his horse by the bridle and from a covert high above two more men appeared with Winchesters. The Blight breathed forth an awed whisper:

"Are they moonshiners?"

I nodded sagely, "Most likely," and the Blight was thrilled. They might have been squirrel-hunters most innocent, but the Blight had heard much talk of moonshine stills and mountain feuds and the men who run them and I took the risk of denying her nothing. Up and

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up we went, those two mules swaying from side to side with a motion little short of elephantine and, by and by, the Blight called out:

"You ride ahead and don't you *dare* look back."

Accustomed to obeying the Blight's orders, I rode ahead with eyes to the front. Presently, a shriek made me turn suddenly. It was nothing—my little sister's mule had gone near a steep cliff—perilously near, as its rider thought, but I saw why I must not look back; those two little girls were riding astride on side-saddles, the booted little right boot of each dangling stirrupless—a posture quite decorous but ludicrous.

"Let us know if anybody comes," they cried. A mountaineer descended into sight around a loop of the path above.

"Change cars!" I shouted.

They changed and, passing, were grave, demure—then they changed again, and thus we climbed.

Such a glory as was below, around and above us; the air like champagne; the sunlight rich and pouring like a flood on the gold that the beeches had strewn in the path, on the gold that the poplars still shook high above and shimmering on the royal scarlet of the maple and the sombre russet of the oak. From far below us to far above us a deep, curving ravine was slashed into

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the mountain-side as by one stroke of a gigantic scimitar. The darkness deep down was lighted up with cool green, interfused with liquid gold. Russet and yellow splashed the mountain-sides beyond and high up the maples were in a shaking blaze. The Blight's swift eyes took all in and with indrawn breath she drank it all deep down.

An hour by sun we were near the top, which was bared of trees and turned into rich farmland covered with blue-grass. Along these upland pastures, dotted with grazing cattle, and across them we rode toward the mountain wildernesses on the other side, down into which a zigzag path wriggles along the steep front of Benham's spur. At the edge of the steep was a cabin and a bushy-bearded mountaineer, who looked like a brigand, answered my hail. He "mought" keep us all night, but he'd "rather not, as we could git a place to stay down the spur." Could we get down before dark? The mountaineer lifted his eyes to where the sun was breaking the horizon of the west into streaks and splashes of yellow and crimson.

"Oh, yes, you can git thar afore dark."

Now I knew that the mountaineer's idea of distance is vague—but he knows how long it takes to get from one place to another. So we started down—dropping at once into thick, dark woods, and as we went looping down, the deeper

was the gloom. That sun had suddenly severed all connection with the laws of gravity and sunk, and it was all the darker because the stars were not out. The path was steep and coiled downward like a wounded snake. In one place a tree had fallen across it, and to reach the next coil of the path below was dangerous. So I had the girls dismount and I led the gray horse down on his haunches. The mules refused to follow, which was rather unusual. I went back and from a safe distance in the rear I belabored them down. They cared neither for gray horse nor crooked path, but turned of their own devilish wills along the bushy mountain-side. As I ran after them the gray horse started calmly on down and those two girls shrieked with laughter—they knew no better. First one way and then the other down the mountain went those mules, with me after them, through thick bushes, over logs, stumps and bowlders and holes—crossing the path a dozen times. What that path was there for never occurred to those long-eared half asses, whole fools, and by and by, when the girls tried to shoo them down they clambered around and above them and struck the path back up the mountain. The horse had gone down one way, the mules up the other, and there was no health in anything. The girls could not go up—so there was nothing to do but go down, which,

hard as it was, was easier than going up. The path was not visible now. Once in a while I would stumble from it and crash through the bushes to the next coil below. Finally I went down, sliding one foot ahead all the time—knowing that when leaves rustled under that foot I was on the point of going astray. Sometimes I had to light a match to make sure of the way, and thus the ridiculous descent was made with those girls in high spirits behind. Indeed, the darker, rockier, steeper it got, the more they shrieked from pure joy—but I was anything than happy. It was dangerous. I didn't know the cliffs and high rocks we might skirt and an unlucky guidance might land us in the creek-bed far down. But the blessed stars came out, the moon peered over a farther mountain and on the last spur there was the gray horse browsing in the path—and the sound of running water not far below. Fortunately on the gray horse were the saddle-bags of the chattering infants who thought the whole thing a mighty lark. We reached the running water, struck a flock of geese and knew, in consequence, that humanity was somewhere near. A few turns of the creek and a beacon light shone below. The pales of a picket fence, the cheering outlines of a log-cabin came in view and at a peaked gate I shouted:

“Hello!”

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You enter no mountaineer's yard without that announcing cry. It was mediæval, the Blight said, positively—two lorn damsels, a benighted knight partially stripped of his armor by bush and sharp-edged rock, a gray palfrey (she didn't mention the impatient asses that had turned homeward) and she wished I had a horn to wind. I wanted a "horn" badly enough—but it was not the kind men wind. By and by we got a response:

"Hello!" was the answer, as an opened door let out into the yard a broad band of light. Could we stay all night? The voice replied that the owner would see "Pap." "Pap" seemed willing, and the boy opened the gate and into the house went the Blight and the little sister. Shortly, I followed.

There, all in one room, lighted by a huge wood-fire, rafters above, puncheon floor beneath—cane-bottomed chairs and two beds the only furniture—"pap," barefooted, the old mother in the chimney-corner with a pipe, strings of red pepper-pods, beans and herbs hanging around and above, a married daughter with a child at her breast, two or three children with yellow hair and bare feet—all looking with all their eyes at the two visitors who had dropped upon them from another world. The Blight's eyes were brighter than usual—that was the only sign she

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gave that she was not in her own drawing-room. Apparently she saw nothing strange or unusual even, but there was really nothing that she did not see or hear and absorb, as few others than the Blight can.

Straightway, the old woman knocked the ashes out of her pipe.

"I reckon you hain't had nothin' to eat," she said, and disappeared. The old man asked questions, the young mother rocked her baby on her knees, the children got less shy and drew near the fireplace, the Blight and the little sister exchanged a furtive smile, and the contrast of the extremes in American civilization, as shown in that little cabin, interested me mightily.

"Yer snack's ready," said the old woman. The old man carried the chairs into the kitchen, and when I followed the girls were seated. The chairs were so low that their chins came barely over their plates, and demure and serious as they were they surely looked most comical. There was the usual bacon and corn-bread and potatoes and sour milk, and the two girls struggled with the rude fare nobly.

After supper I joined the old man and the old woman with a pipe—exchanging my tobacco for their long green with more satisfaction probably to me than to them, for the long green was good, and strong and fragrant.

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The old woman asked the Blight and the little sister many questions and they, in turn, showed great interest in the baby in arms, whereat the eighteen-year-old mother blushed and looked greatly pleased.

"You got mighty purty black eyes," said the old woman to the Blight, and not to slight the little sister she added, "An' you got mighty purty teeth."

The Blight showed hers in a radiant smile and the old woman turned back to her.

"Oh, you've got both," she said and she shook her head, as though she were thinking of the damage they had done. It was my time now—to ask questions.

They didn't have many amusements on that creek, I discovered—and no dances. Sometimes the boys went 'coon-hunting and there were corn-shuckings, house-raising and quilting-parties.

"Does anybody round here play the banjo?"

"None o' my boys," said the old woman; "but Tom Green's son down the creek—he follers pickin' the banjo a leetle." "Follers pickin'"—the Blight did not miss that phrase.

"What do you foller fer a livin'?" the old man asked me suddenly.

"I write for a living." He thought a while.

"Well, it must be purty fine to have a good

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handwrite." This nearly dissolved the Blight and the little sister, but they held on heroically.

"Is there much fighting around here?" I asked presently.

"Not much 'cept when one young feller up the river gets to tearin' up things. I heerd as how he was over to the Gap last week—raisin' hell. He comes by here on his way home." The Blight's eyes opened wide—apparently we were on his trail. It is not wise for a member of the police guard at the Gap to show too much curiosity about the lawless ones of the hills, and I asked no questions.

"They calls him the Wild Dog over here," he added, and then he yawned cavernously.

I looked around with divining eye for the sleeping arrangements soon to come, which sometimes are embarrassing to "furriners" who are unable to grasp at once the primitive unconsciousness of the mountaineers and, in consequence, accept a point of view natural to them because enforced by architectural limitations and a hospitality that turns no one seeking shelter from any door. They were, however, better prepared than I had hoped for. They had a spare room on the porch and just outside the door, and when the old woman led the two girls to it, I followed with their saddle-bags. The room was about seven feet by six and was windowless.

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"You'd better leave your door open a little," I said, "or you'll smother in there."

"Well," said the old woman, "hit's all right to leave the door open. Nothin's goin' ter bother ye, but one o' my sons is out a 'coon-huntin' and he mought come in, not knowin' you're thar. But you jes' holler an' he'll move on." She meant precisely what she said and saw no humor at all in such a possibility—but when the door closed, I could hear those girls stifling shrieks of laughter.

Literally, that night, I was a member of the family. I had a bed to myself (the following night I was not so fortunate)—in one corner; behind the head of mine the old woman, the daughter-in-law and the baby had another in the other corner, and the old man with the two boys spread a pallet on the floor. That is the invariable rule of courtesy with the mountaineer, to give his bed to the stranger and take to the floor himself, and, in passing, let me say that never, in a long experience, have I seen the slightest consciousness—much less immodesty—in a mountain cabin in my life. The same attitude on the part of the visitors is taken for granted—any other indeed holds mortal possibilities of offence—so that if the visitor has common sense, all embarrassment passes at once. The door was closed, the fire blazed on uncovered, the

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smothered talk and laughter of the two girls ceased, the 'coon-hunter came not and the night passed in peace.

It must have been near daybreak that I was aroused by the old man leaving the cabin and I heard voices and the sound of horses' feet outside. When he came back he was grinning.

"Hit's your mules."

"Who found them?"

"The Wild Dog had 'em," he said.

III

THE AURICULAR TALENT OF THE HON. SAMUEL BUDD

BEHIND us came the Hon. Samuel Budd. Just when the sun was slitting the east with a long streak of fire, the Hon. Samuel was, with the jocund day, standing tiptoe in his stirrups on the misty mountain-top and peering into the ravine down which we had slid the night before, and he grumbled no little when he saw that he, too, must get off his horse and slide down. The Hon. Samuel was ambitious, Southern, and a lawyer. Without saying, it goes that he was also a politician. He was not a native of the mountains, but he had cast his fortunes in the highlands, and he was taking the first step that he hoped would, before many years, land him in the National Capitol. He really knew little about the mountaineers, even now, and he had never been among his constituents on Devil's Fork, where he was bound now. The campaign had so far been full of humor and full of trials—not the least of which sprang from the fact

that it was sorghum time. Everybody through the mountains was making sorghum, and every mountain child was eating molasses.

Now, as the world knows, the straightest way to the heart of the honest voter is through the women of the land, and the straightest way to the heart of the women is through the children of the land; and one method of winning both, with rural politicians, is to kiss the babies wide and far. So as each infant, at sorghum time, has a circle of green-brown stickiness about his chubby lips, and as the Hon. Sam was averse to "long sweetenin'" even in his coffee, this particular political device just now was no small trial to the Hon. Samuel Budd. But in the language of one of his firmest supporters—Uncle Tommie Hendricks:

"The Hon. Sam done his duty, and he done it damn well."

The issue at stake was the site of the new Court-House—two localities claiming the right undisputed, because they were the only two places in the county where there was enough level land for the Court-House to stand on. Let no man think this a trivial issue. There had been a similar one over on the Virginia side once, and the opposing factions agreed to decide the question by the ancient wager of battle, fist and skull—two hundred men on each side—and the wom-

en of the county with difficulty prevented the fight. Just now, Mr. Budd was on his way to "The Pocket"—the voting place of one faction—where he had never been, where the hostility against him was most bitter, and, that day, he knew he was "up against" Waterloo, the crossing of the Rubicon, holding the pass at Thermopylæ, or any other historical crisis in the history of man.

I was saddling the mules when the cackling of geese in the creek announced the coming of the Hon. Samuel Budd, coming with his chin on his breast—deep in thought. Still his eyes beamed cheerily, he lifted his slouched hat gallantly to the Blight and the little sister, and he would wait for us to jog along with him. I told him of our troubles, meanwhile. The Wild Dog had restored our mules—and the Hon. Sam beamed:

"He's a wonder—where is he?"

"He never waited—even for thanks."

Again the Hon. Sam beamed:

"Ah! just like him. He's gone ahead to help me."

"Well, how did he happen to be here?" I asked.

"He's everywhere," said the Hon. Sam.

"How did he know the mules were ours?"

"Easy. That boy knows everything."

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"Well, why did he bring them back and then leave so mysteriously?"

The Hon. Sam silently pointed a finger at the laughing Blight ahead, and I looked incredulous.

"Just the same, that's another reason I told you to warn Marston. He's already got it in his head that Marston is his rival."

"Pshaw!" I said—for it was too ridiculous.

"All right," said the Hon. Sam placidly.

"Then why doesn't he want to see her?"

"How do you know he ain't watchin' her now, for all we know? Mark me," he added, "you won't see him at the speakin', but I'll bet fruit cake agin gingerbread he'll be somewhere around."

So we went on, the two girls leading the way and the Hon. Sam now telling his political troubles to me. Half a mile down the road, a solitary horseman stood waiting, and Mr. Budd gave a low whistle.

"One o' my rivals," he said, from the corner of his mouth.

"Mornin'," said the horseman; "lemme see you a minute."

He made a movement to draw aside, but the Hon. Samuel made a counter-gesture of dissent.

"This gentleman is a friend of mine," he said firmly, but with great courtesy, "and he can hear what you have to say to me."

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The mountaineer rubbed one huge hand over his stubby chin, threw one of his long legs over the pommel of his saddle, and dangled a heavy cowhide shoe to and fro.

"Would you mind tellin' me whut pay a member of the House of Legislatur' gits a day?"

The Hon. Sam looked surprised.

"I think about two dollars and a half."

"An' his meals?"

"No!" laughed Mr. Budd.

"Well, look-ee here, stranger. I'm a pore man an' I've got a mortgage on my farm. That money don't mean nothin' to you—but if you'll draw out now an' I win, I'll tell ye whut I'll do." He paused as though to make sure that the sacrifice was possible. "I'll just give ye half of that two dollars and a half a day, as shore as you're a-settin' on that hoss, and you won't hav' to hit a durn lick to earn it."

I had not the heart to smile—nor did the Hon. Samuel—so artless and simple was the man and so pathetic his appeal.

"You see—you'll divide my vote, an' ef we both run, ole Josh Barton'll git it shore. Ef you git out o' the way, I can lick him easy."

Mr. Budd's answer was kind, instructive, and uplifted.

"My friend," said he, "I'm sorry, but I cannot possibly accede to your request for the fol-

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lowing reasons: First, it would not be fair to my constituents; secondly, it would hardly be seeming to barter the noble gift of the people to which we both aspire; thirdly, you might lose with me out of the way; and fourthly, I'm going to win whether you are in the way or not."

The horseman slowly collapsed while the Hon. Samuel was talking, and now he threw the leg back, kicked for his stirrup twice, spat once, and turned his horse's head.

"I reckon you will, stranger," he said sadly, "with that gift o' gab o' yourn." He turned without another word or nod of good-by and started back up the creek whence he had come.

"One gone," said the Hon. Samuel Budd grimly, "and I swear I'm right sorry for him." And so was I.

An hour later we struck the river, and another hour upstream brought us to where the contest of tongues was to come about. No sylvan dell in Arcady could have been lovelier than the spot. Above the road, a big spring poured a clear little stream over shining pebbles into the river; above it the bushes hung thick with autumn leaves, and above them stood yellow beeches like pillars of pale fire. On both sides of the road sat and squatted the honest voters, sour-looking, disgruntled — a distinctly hostile crowd. The Blight and my little sister drew great and curi-

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ous attention as they sat on a bowlder above the spring while I went with the Hon. Samuel Budd under the guidance of Uncle Tommie Hendricks, who introduced him right and left. The Hon. Samuel was cheery, but he was plainly nervous. There were two lanky youths whose names, oddly enough, were Budd. As they gave him their huge paws in lifeless fashion, the Hon. Samuel slapped one on the shoulder, with the true democracy of the politician, and said jocosely:

“Well, we Budds may not be what you call great people, but, thank God, none of us have ever been in the penitentiary,” and he laughed loudly, thinking that he had scored a great and jolly point. The two young men looked exceedingly grave and Uncle Tommie panic-stricken. He plucked the Hon. Sam by the sleeve and led him aside:

“I reckon you made a leetle mistake thar. Them two fellers’ daddy died in the penitentiary last spring.” The Hon. Sam whistled mournfully, but he looked game enough when his opponent rose to speak—Uncle Josh Barton, who had short, thick, upright hair, little, sharp eyes, and a rasping voice. Uncle Josh wasted no time:

“Feller-citizens,” he shouted, “this man is a lawyer—he’s a corporation lawyer”; the fearful name—pronounced “lie-yer”—rang through

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the crowd like a trumpet, and like lightning the Hon. Sam was on his feet.

"The man who says that is a liar," he said calmly, "and I demand your authority for the statement. If you won't give it—I shall hold you personally responsible, sir."

It was a strike home, and under the flashing eyes that stared unwaveringly through the big goggles, Uncle Josh halted and stammered and admitted that he might have been misinformed.

"Then I advise you to be more careful," cautioned the Hon. Samuel sharply.

"Feller-citizens," said Uncle Josh, "if he ain't a corporation lawyer—who is this man? Where did he come from? I have been born and raised among you. You all know me—do you know him? Whut's he a-doin' now? He's a fine-haired furriner, an' he's come down hyeh from the settlemint to tell ye that you hain't got no man in yo' own deestric that's fittin' to represent ye in the legislatur'. Look at him—look at him! He's got *four* eyes! Look at his hair—hit's *parted in the middle!*" There was a storm of laughter—Uncle Josh had made good—and if the Hon. Samuel could straightway have turned bald-headed and sightless, he would have been a happy man. He looked sick with hopelessness, but Uncle Tommie Hendricks, his mentor, was vigorously whispering something in

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his ear, and gradually his face cleared. Indeed, the Hon. Samuel was smilingly confident when he rose.

Like his rival, he stood in the open road, and the sun beat down on his parted yellow hair, so that the eyes of all could see, and the laughter was still running round.

"Who is your Uncle Josh?" he asked with threatening mildness. "I know I was not born here, but, my friends, I couldn't help that. And just as soon as I could get away from where I was born, I came here and," he paused with lips parted and long finger outstretched, "and—I—came—because—I *wanted*—to come—and *not* because *I had to*."

Now it seems that Uncle Josh, too, was not a native and that he had left home early in life for his State's good and for his own. Uncle Tommie had whispered this, and the Hon. Samuel raised himself high on both toes while the expectant crowd, on the verge of a roar, waited—as did Uncle Joshua, with a sickly smile.

"Why did your Uncle Josh come among you? Because he was hoop-poled away from home." Then came the roar—and the Hon. Samuel had to quell it with uplifted hand.

"And did your Uncle Joshua marry a mountain wife? No! He didn't think any of your

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mountain women were good enough for him, so he slips down into the settlements and *steals* one. And now, fellow-citizens, that is just what I'm here for—I'm looking for a nice mountain girl, and I'm going to have her." Again the Hon. Samuel had to still the roar, and then he went on quietly to show how they must lose the Court-House site if they did not send him to the legislature, and how, while they might not get it if they did send him, it was their only hope to send only him. The crowd had grown somewhat hostile again, and it was after one telling period, when the Hon. Samuel stopped to mop his brow, that a gigantic mountaineer rose in the rear of the crowd:

"Talk on, stranger; you're talking sense. I'll trust ye. You've got big ears!"

Now the Hon. Samuel possessed a primordial talent that is rather rare in these physically degenerate days. He said nothing, but stood quietly in the middle of the road. The eyes of the crowd on either side of the road began to bulge, the lips of all opened with wonder, and a simultaneous burst of laughter rose around the Hon. Samuel Budd. A dozen men sprang to their feet and rushed up to him—looking at those remarkable ears, as they gravely wagged to and fro. That settled things, and as we left, the Hon. Sam was having things his own way,

and on the edge of the crowd Uncle Tommie Hendricks was shaking his head:

“ I tell ye, boys, he ain't no jackass—even if he can flop his ears.”

At the river we started upstream, and some impulse made me turn in my saddle and look back. All the time I had had an eye open for the young mountaineer whose interest in us seemed to be so keen. And now I saw, standing at the head of a gray horse, on the edge of the crowd, a tall figure with his hands on his hips and looking after us. I couldn't be sure, but it looked like the Wild Dog.

IV

CLOSE QUARTERS

TWO hours up the river we struck Buck. Buck was sitting on the fence by the roadside, barefooted and hatless.

"How-dye-do?" I said.

"Purty well," said Buck.

"Any fish in this river?"

"Several," said Buck. Now in mountain speech, "several" means simply "a good many."

"Any minnows in these branches?"

"I seed several in the branch back o' our house."

"How far away do you live?"

"Oh, 'bout one whoop an' a holler." If he had spoken Greek the Blight could not have been more puzzled. He meant he lived as far as a man's voice would carry with one yell and a holler.

"Will you help me catch some?" Buck nodded.

"All right," I said, turning my horse up to

the fence. "Get on behind." The horse shied his hind quarters away, and I pulled him back.

"Now, you can get on, if you'll be quick." Buck sat still.

"Yes," he said imperturbably; "but I ain't quick." The two girls laughed aloud, and Buck looked surprised.

Around a curving cornfield we went, and through a meadow which Buck said was a "nigh cut." From the limb of a tree that we passed hung a piece of wire with an iron ring swinging at its upturned end. A little farther was another tree and another ring, and farther on another and another.

"For Heaven's sake, Buck, what are these things?"

"Mart's a-gittin' ready fer a tourneyment."

"A what?"

"That's whut Mart calls hit. He was over to the Gap last Fourth o' July, an' he says fellers over thar fix up like Kuklux and go a-chargin' on hosses and takin' off them rings with a ash-stick—'spear,' Mart calls hit. He come back an' he says he's a-goin' to win that ar tourneyment next Fourth o' July. He's got the best hoss up this river, and on Sundays him an' Dave Branham goes a-chargin' along here a-pickin' off these rings jus' a-flyin'; an' Mart can do hit, I'm

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tellin' ye. Dave's mighty good hisself, but he ain't nowhar 'longside o' Mart."

This was strange. I had told the Blight about our Fourth of July, and how on the Virginia side the ancient custom of the tournament still survived. It was on the last Fourth of July that she had meant to come to the Gap. Truly civilization was spreading throughout the hills.

"Who's Mart?"

"Mart's my brother," said little Buck. "He was over to the Gap not long ago, an' he come back mad as hops—" He stopped suddenly, and in such a way that I turned my head, knowing that caution had caught Buck.

"What about?"

"Oh, nothin'," said Buck carelessly; "only he's been quar ever since. My sister says he's got a gal over thar, an' he's a-pickin' off these rings more'n ever now. He's going to win or bust a belly-band."

"Well, who's Dave Branham?"

Buck grinned. "You jes axe my sister Mollie. Thar she is."

Before us was a white-framed house of logs in the porch of which stood two stalwart, good-looking girls. Could we stay all night? We could—there was no hesitation—and straight in we rode.

"Where's your father?" Both girls giggled, and one said, with frank unembarrassment:

"Pap's tight!" That did not look promising, but we had to stay just the same. Buck helped me to unhitch the mules, helped me also to catch minnows, and in half an hour we started down the river to try fishing before dark came. Buck trotted along.

"Have you got a wagon, Buck?"

"What fer?"

"To bring the fish back." Buck was not to be caught napping.

"We got that sled thar, but hit won't be big enough," he said gravely. "An' our two-hoss wagon's out in the cornfield. We'll have to string the fish, leave 'em in the river and go fer 'em in the mornin'."

"All right, Buck." The Blight was greatly amused at Buck.

Two hundred yards down the road stood his sisters over the figure of a man outstretched in the road. Unashamed, they smiled at us. The man in the road was "pap"—tight—and they were trying to get him home.

We cast into a dark pool farther down and fished most patiently; not a bite—not a nibble.

"Are there any fish in here, Buck?"

"Dunno—used ter be." The shadows deepened; we must go back to the house.

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"Is there a dam below here, Buck?"

"Yes, thar's a dam about a half-mile down the river."

I was disgusted. No wonder there were no bass in that pool.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"You never axed me," said Buck placidly.

I began winding in my line.

"Ain't no bottom to that pool," said Buck.

Now I never saw any rural community where there was not a bottomless pool, and I suddenly determined to shake one tradition in at least one community. So I took an extra fish-line, tied a stone to it, and climbed into a canoe, Buck watching me, but not asking a word.

"Get in, Buck."

Silently he got in and I pushed off—to the centre.

"This the deepest part, Buck?"

"I reckon so."

I dropped in the stone and the line reeled out some fifty feet and began to coil on the surface of the water.

"I guess that's on the bottom, isn't it, Buck?"

Buck looked genuinely distressed; but presently he brightened.

"Yes," he said, "ef hit ain't on a turtle's back."

Literally I threw up both hands and back we trailed—fishless.

“Reckon you won’t need that two-hoss wagon,” said Buck.

“No, Buck, I think not.” Buck looked at the Blight and gave himself the pleasure of his first chuckle. A big, crackling, cheerful fire awaited us. Through the door I could see, outstretched on a bed in the next room, the limp figure of “pap” in alcoholic sleep. The old mother, big, kind-faced, explained—and there was a heaven of kindness and charity in her drawling voice.

“Dad didn’ often git that a-way,” she said; “but he’d been out a-huntin’ hawks that mornin’ and had met up with some teamsters and gone to a political speakin’ and had tuk a dram or two of their mean whiskey, and not havin’ nothin’ on his stummick, hit had all gone to his head. No, ‘pap’ didn’t git that a-way often, and he’d be all right jes’ as soon as he slept it off a while.” The old woman moved about with a cane and the sympathetic Blight merely looked a question at her.

“Yes, she’d fell down a year ago—and had sort o’ hurt herself—didn’t do nothin’, though, ’cept break one hip,” she added, in her kind, patient old voice. Did many people stop there? Oh, yes, sometimes fifteen at a time—they “never turned nobody away.” And she had a

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big family, little Cindy and the two big girls and Buck and Mart—who was out somewhere—and the hired man, and yes—"Thar was another boy, but he was fitified," said one of the big sisters.

"I beg your pardon," said the wondering Blight, but she knew that phrase wouldn't do, so she added politely:

"What did you say?"

"Fitified—Tom has fits. He's in a asylum in the settlements."

"Tom come back once an' he was all right," said the old mother; "but he worried so much over them gals workin' so hard that it plum' threw him off ag'in, and we had to send him back."

"Do you work pretty hard?" I asked presently. Then a story came that was full of unconscious pathos, because there was no hint of complaint—simply a plain statement of daily life. They got up before the men, in order to get breakfast ready; then they went with the men into the fields—those two girls—and worked like men. At dark they got supper ready, and after the men went to bed they worked on—washing dishes and clearing up the kitchen. They took it turn about getting supper, and sometimes, one said, she was "so plumb tuckered out that she'd drap on the bed and go to sleep ruther than eat

her own supper." No wonder poor Tom had to go back to the asylum. All the while the two girls stood by the fire looking, politely but minutely, at the two strange girls and their curious clothes and their boots, and the way they dressed their hair. Their hard life seemed to have hurt them none—for both were the pictures of health—whatever that phrase means.

After supper "pap" came in, perfectly sober, with a big, ruddy face, giant frame, and twinkling gray eyes. He was the man who had risen to speak his faith in the Hon. Samuel Budd that day on the size of the Hon. Samuel's ears. He, too, was unashamed and, as he explained his plight again, he did it with little apology.

"I seed ye at the speakin' to-day. That man Budd is a good man. He done somethin' fer a boy o' mine over at the Gap." Like little Buck, he, too, stopped short. "He's a good man an' I'm a-goin' to help him."

Yes, he repeated, quite irrelevantly, it was hunting hogs all day with nothing to eat and only mean whiskey to drink. Mart had not come in yet—he was "workin' out" now.

"He's the best worker in these mountains," said the old woman; "Mart works too hard."

The hired man appeared and joined us at the fire. Bedtime came, and I whispered jokingly to the Blight:

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"I believe I'll ask that good-looking one to 'set up' with me." "Settin' up" is what court-ing is called in the hills. The couple sit up in front of the fire after everybody else has gone to bed. The man puts his arm around the girl's neck and whispers; then she puts her arm around his neck and whispers—so that the rest may not hear. This I had related to the Blight, and now she withered me.

"You just do, now!"

I turned to the girl in question, whose name was Mollie. "Buck told me to ask you who Dave Branham was." Mollie wheeled, blushing and angry, but Buck had darted, cackling, out the door. "Oh," I said, and I changed the subject. "What time do you get up?"

"Oh, 'bout crack o' day." I was tired, and that was discouraging.

"Do you get up that early every morning?"

"No," was the quick answer; "a mornin' later."

A morning later, Mollie got up, each morning. The Blight laughed.

Pretty soon the two girls were taken into the next room, which was a long one, with one bed in one dark corner, one in the other, and a third bed in the middle. The feminine members of the family all followed them out on the porch and watched them brush their teeth, for they had

never seen tooth-brushes before. They watched them prepare for bed—and I could hear much giggling and comment and many questions, all of which culminated, by and by, in a chorus of shrieking laughter. That climax, as I learned next morning, was over the Blight's hot-water bag. Never had their eyes rested on an article of more wonder and humor than that water bag.

By and by, the feminine members came back and we sat around the fire. Still Mart did not appear, though somebody stepped into the kitchen, and from the warning glance that Mollie gave Buck when she left the room I guessed that the newcomer was her lover Dave. Pretty soon the old man yawned.

"Well, mammy, I reckon this stranger's about ready to lay down, if you've got a place fer him."

"Git a light, Buck," said the old woman. Buck got a light—a chimneyless, smoking oil-lamp—and led me into the same room where the Blight and my little sister were. Their heads were covered up, but the bed in the gloom of one corner was shaking with their smothered laughter. Buck pointed to the middle bed.

"I can get along without that light, Buck," I said, and I must have been rather haughty and abrupt, for a stifled shriek came from under the bedclothes in the corner and Buck disappeared

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swiftly. Preparations for bed are simple in the mountains—they were primitively simple for me that night. Being in knickerbockers, I merely took off my coat and shoes. Presently somebody else stepped into the room and the bed in the other corner creaked. Silence for a while. Then the door opened, and the head of the old woman was thrust in.

“Mart!” she said coaxingly; “git up thar now an’ climb over inter bed with that ar stranger.”

That was Mart at last, over in the corner. Mart turned, grumbled, and, to my great pleasure, swore that he wouldn’t. The old woman waited a moment.

“Mart,” she said again with gentle imperiousness, “git up thar now, I tell ye—you’ve got to sleep with that thar stranger.”

She closed the door and with a snort Mart piled into bed with me. I gave him plenty of room and did not introduce myself. A little more dark silence—the shaking of the bed under the hilarity of those astonished, bethrilled, but thoroughly unfrightened young women in the dark corner on my left ceased, and again the door opened. This time it was the hired man, and I saw that the trouble was either that neither Mart nor Buck wanted to sleep with the hired man or that neither wanted to sleep with me.

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A long silence and then the boy Buck slipped in. The hired man delivered himself with the intonation somewhat of a circuit rider.

"I've been a-watchin' that star thar, through the winder. Sometimes hit moves, then hit stands plum' still, an' ag'in hit gits to pitchin'." The hired man must have been touching up mean whiskey himself. Meanwhile, Mart seemed to be having spells of troubled slumber. He would snore gently, accentuate said snore with a sudden quiver of his body and then wake up with a climacteric snort and start that would shake the bed. This was repeated several times, and I began to think of the unfortunate Tom who was "fitified." Mart seemed on the verge of a fit himself, and I waited apprehensively for each snorting climax to see if fits were a family failing. They were not. Peace overcame Mart and he slept deeply, but not I. The hired man began to show symptoms. He would roll and groan, dreaming of feuds, *quorum pars magna fuit*, it seemed, and of religious conversion, in which he feared he was not so great. Twice he said aloud:

"An' I tell you thar wouldn't a one of 'em have said a word if I'd been killed stone-dead." Twice he said it almost weepingly, and now and then he would groan appealingly:

"O Lawd, have mercy on my pore soul!"

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Fortunately those two tired girls slept—I could hear their breathing—but sleep there was little for me. Once the troubled soul with the hoe got up and stumbled out to the water-bucket on the porch to soothe the fever or whatever it was that was burning him, and after that he was quiet. I awoke before day. The dim light at the window showed an empty bed—Buck and the hired man were gone. Mart was slipping out of the side of my bed, but the girls still slept on. I watched Mart, for I guessed I might now see what, perhaps, is the distinguishing trait of American civilization down to its bed-rock, as you find it through the West and in the Southern hills—a chivalrous respect for women. Mart thought I was asleep. Over in the corner were two creatures the like of which I supposed he had never seen and would not see, since he came in too late the night before, and was going away too early now—and two angels straight from heaven could not have stirred my curiosity any more than they already must have stirred his. But not once did Mart turn his eyes, much less his face, toward the corner where they were—not once, for I watched him closely. And when he went out he sent his little sister back for his shoes, which the night-walking hired man had accidentally kicked toward the foot of the strangers' bed. In a minute I was out after him,

but he was gone. Behind me the two girls opened their eyes on a room that was empty save for them. Then the Blight spoke (this I was told later).

"Dear," she said, "have our room-mates gone?"

Breakfast at dawn. The mountain girls were ready to go to work. All looked sorry to have us leave. They asked us to come back again, and they meant it. We said we would like to come back—and we meant it—to see them—the kind old mother, the pioneer-like old man, sturdy little Buck, shy little Cindy, the elusive, hard-working, unconsciously shivery Mart, and the two big sisters. As we started back up the river the sisters started for the fields, and I thought of their stricken brother in the settlements, who must have been much like Mart.

Back up the Big Black Mountain we toiled, and late in the afternoon we were on the State line that runs the crest of the Big Black. Right on top and bisected by that State line sat a dingy little shack, and there, with one leg thrown over the pommel of his saddle, sat Marston, drinking water from a gourd.

"I was coming over to meet you," he said, smiling at the Blight, who, greatly pleased, smiled back at him. The shack was a "blind Tiger" where whiskey could be sold to Ken-

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tuckians on the Virginia side and to Virginians on the Kentucky side. Hanging around were the slouching figures of several moonshiners and the villainous fellow who ran it.

"They are real ones all right," said Marston. "One of them killed a revenue officer at that front door last week, and was killed by the posse as he was trying to escape out of the back window. That house will be in ashes soon," he added. And it was.

As we rode down the mountain we told him about our trip and the people with whom we had spent the night—and all the time he was smiling curiously.

"Buck," he said. "Oh, yes, I know that little chap. Mart had him posted down there on the river to toll you to his house—to toll *you*," he added to the Blight. He pulled in his horse suddenly, turned and looked up toward the top of the mountain.

"Ah, I thought so." We all looked back. On the edge of the cliff, far upward, on which the "blind Tiger" sat was a gray horse, and on it was a man who, motionless, was looking down at us. "He's been following you all the way," said the engineer.

"Who's been following us?" I asked.

"That's Mart up there—my friend and yours," said Marston to the Blight. "I'm

rather glad I didn't meet you on the other side of the mountain—that's 'the Wild Dog.' " The Blight looked incredulous, but Marston knew the man and knew the horse.

So Mart—hard-working Mart—was the Wild Dog, and he was content to do the Blight all service without thanks, merely for the privilege of secretly seeing her face now and then; and yet he would not look upon that face when she was a guest under his roof and asleep.

Still, when we dropped behind the two girls I gave Marston the Hon. Sam's warning, and for a moment he looked rather grave.

"Well," he said, smiling, "if I'm found in the road some day, you'll know who did it."

I shook my head. "Oh, no; he isn't that bad."

"I don't know," said Marston.

The smoke of the young engineer's coke ovens lay far below us and the Blight had never seen a coke-plant before. It looked like Hades even in the early dusk—the snake-like coil of fiery ovens stretching up the long, deep ravine, and the smoke-streaked clouds of fire, trailing like a yellow mist over them, with a fierce white blast shooting up here and there when the lid of an oven was raised, as though to add fresh temperature to some particular malefactor in some par-

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ticular chamber of torment. Humanity about was joyous, however. Laughter and banter and song came from the cabins that lined the big ravine and the little ravines opening into it. A banjo tinkled at the entrance of "Possum Trot," sacred to the darkies. We moved toward it. On the stoop sat an ecstatic picker and in the dust shuffled three pickaninnies—one boy and two girls—the youngest not five years old. The crowd that was gathered about them gave way respectfully as we drew near; the little darkies showed their white teeth in jolly grins, and their feet shook the dust in happy competition. I showered a few coins for the Blight and on we went—into the mouth of the many-peaked Gap. The night train was coming in and everybody had a smile of welcome for the Blight—post-office assistant, drug clerk, soda-water boy, telegraph operator, hostler, who came for the mules—and when tired, but happy, she slipped from her saddle to the ground, she then and there gave me what she usually reserves for Christmas morning, and that, too, while Marston was looking on. Over her shoulder I smiled at him.

That night Marston and the Blight sat under the vines on the porch until the late moon rose over Wallens Ridge, and, when bedtime came, the Blight said impatiently that she did not want

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to go home. She had to go, however, next day, but on the next Fourth of July she would surely come again; and, as the young engineer mounted his horse and set his face toward Black Mountain, I knew that until that day, for him, a blight would still be in the hills.

V

BACK TO THE HILLS

WINTER drew a gray veil over the mountains, wove into it tiny jewels of frost and turned it many times into a mask of snow, before spring broke again among them and in Marston's impatient heart. No spring had ever been like that to him. The coming of young leaves and flowers and bird-song meant but one joy for the hills to him—the Blight was coming back to them. All those weary waiting months he had clung grimly to his work. He must have heard from her sometimes, else I think he would have gone to her; but I knew the Blight's pen was reluctant and casual for anybody, and, moreover, she was having a strenuous winter at home. That he knew as well, for he took one paper, at least, that he might simply read her name. He saw accounts of her many social doings as well, and ate his heart out as lovers have done for all time gone and will do for all time to come.

I, too, was away all winter, but I got back a

month before the Blight, to learn much of interest that had come about. The Hon. Samuel Budd had ear-wagged himself into the legislature, had moved that Court-House, and was going to be State Senator. The Wild Dog had confined his reckless career to his own hills through the winter, but when spring came, migratory-like, he began to take frequent wing to the Gap. So far, he and Marston had never come into personal conflict, though Marston kept ever ready for him, and several times they had met in the road, eyed each other in passing and made no hipward gesture at all. But then Marston had never met him when the Wild Dog was drunk—and when sober, I took it that the one act of kindness from the engineer always stayed his hand. But the Police Guard at the Gap saw him quite often—and to it he was a fearful and elusive nuisance. He seemed to be staying somewhere within a radius of ten miles, for every night or two he would circle about the town, yelling and firing his pistol, and when we chased him, escaping through the Gap or up the valley or down in Lee. Many plans were laid to catch him, but all failed, and finally he came in one day and gave himself up and paid his fines. Afterward I recalled that the time of this gracious surrender to law and order was but little subsequent to one morning when a woman

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who brought butter and eggs to my little sister casually asked when that "purty slim little gal with the snappin' black eyes was a-comin' back." And the little sister, pleased with the remembrance, had said cordially that she was coming soon.

Thereafter the Wild Dog was in town every day, and he behaved well until one Saturday he got drunk again, and this time, by a peculiar chance, it was Marston again who leaped on him, wrenched his pistol away, and put him in the calaboose. Again he paid his fine, promptly visited a "blind Tiger," came back to town, emptied another pistol at Marston on sight and fled for the hills.

The enraged Guard chased him for two days and from that day the Wild Dog was a marked man. The Guard wanted many men, but if they could have had their choice they would have picked out of the world of malefactors that same Wild Dog.

Why all this should have thrown the Hon. Samuel Budd into such gloom I could not understand—except that the Wild Dog had been so loyal a henchman to him in politics, but later I learned a better reason, that threatened to cost the Hon. Sam much more than the fines that, as I later learned, he had been paying for his mountain friend.

Meanwhile, the Blight was coming from her Northern home through the green lowlands of Jersey, the fat pastures of Maryland, and, as the white dresses of school-girls and the shining faces of darkies thickened at the stations, she knew that she was getting southward. All the way she was known and welcomed, and next morning she awoke with the keen air of the distant mountains in her nostrils and an expectant light in her happy eyes. At least the light was there when she stepped daintily from the dusty train and it leaped a little, I fancied, when Marston, bronzed and flushed, held out his sunburnt hand. Like a convent girl she babbled questions to the little sister as the dummy puffed along and she bubbled like wine over the midsummer glory of the hills. And well she might, for the glory of the mountains, full-leafed, shrouded in evening shadows, blue-veiled in the distance, was unspeakable, and through the Gap the sun was sending his last rays as though he, too, meant to take a peep at her before he started around the world to welcome her next day. And she must know everything at once. The anniversary of the Great Day on which all men were pronounced free and equal was only ten days distant and preparations were going on. There would be a big crowd of mountaineers and there would be

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sports of all kinds, and games, but the tournament was to be the feature of the day. "A tournament?" "Yes, a tournament," repeated the little sister, and Marston was going to ride and the mean thing would not tell what mediæval name he meant to take. And the Hon. Sam. Budd—did the Blight remember him? (indeed, she did)—had a "dark horse," and he had bet heavily that his dark horse would win the tournament—whereat the little sister looked at Marston and at the Blight and smiled disdainfully. And the Wild Dog—*did* she remember him? I checked the sister here with a glance, for Marston looked uncomfortable and the Blight saw me do it, and on the point of saying something she checked herself, and her face, I thought, paled a little.

That night I learned why—when she came in from the porch after Marston was gone. I saw she had wormed enough of the story out of him to worry her, for her face this time was distinctly pale. I would tell her no more than she knew, however, and then she said she was sure she had seen the Wild Dog herself that afternoon, sitting on his horse in the bushes near a station in Wildcat Valley. She was sure that he saw her, and his face had frightened her. I knew her fright was for Marston and not for herself, so I laughed

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at her fears. She was mistaken—Wild Dog was an outlaw now and he would not dare appear at the Gap, and there was no chance that he could harm her or Marston. And yet I was uneasy.

It must have been a happy ten days for those two young people. Every afternoon Marston would come in from the mines and they would go off horseback together, over ground that I well knew—for I had been all over it myself—up through the gray-peaked rhododendron-bordered Gap with the swirling water below them and the gray rock high above where another such foolish lover lost his life, climbing to get a flower for his sweetheart, or down the winding dirt road into Lee, or up through the beech woods behind Imboden Hill, or climbing the spur of Morris's Farm to watch the sunset over the majestic Big Black Mountains, where the Wild Dog lived, and back through the fragrant, cool, moonlit woods. He was doing his best, Marston was, and he was having trouble—as every man should. And that trouble I knew even better than he, for I had once known a Southern girl who was so tender of heart that she could refuse no man who really loved her—she accepted him and sent him to her father, who did all of her refusing for her. And I knew no man would know that he had won the Blight un-

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til he had her at the altar and the priestly hand of benediction was above her head.

Of such kind was the Blight. Every night when they came in I could read the story of the day, always in his face and sometimes in hers; and it was a series of ups and downs that must have wrung the boy's heart bloodless. Still I was in good hope for him, until the crisis came on the night before the Fourth. The quarrel was as plain as though typewritten on the face of each. Marston would not come in that night and the Blight went dinnerless to bed and cried herself to sleep. She told the little sister that she had seen the Wild Dog again peering through the bushes, and that she was frightened. That was her explanation—but I guessed a better one.

VI

THE GREAT DAY

IT was a day to make glad the heart of slave or freeman. The earth was cool from a night-long rain, and a gentle breeze fanned coolness from the north all day long. The clouds were snow-white, tumbling, ever-moving, and between them the sky showed blue and deep. Grass, leaf, weed and flower were in the richness that comes to the green things of the earth just before that full tide of summer whose foam is drifting thistle-down. The air was clear and the mountains seemed to have brushed the haze from their faces and drawn nearer that they, too, might better see the doings of that day.

From the four winds of heaven, that morning, came the brave and the free. Up from Lee, down from Little Stone Gap, and from over in Scott, came the valley-farmers—horseback, in buggies, hacks, two-horse wagons, with wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts, in white dresses, beflowered hats, and many ribbons, and with dinner-baskets stuffed with good things to eat—old

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ham, young chicken, angel-cake and blackberry wine—to be spread in the sunless shade of great poplar and oak. From Bum Hollow and Wildcat Valley and from up the slopes that lead to Cracker's Neck came smaller tillers of the soil—as yet but faintly marked by the gewgaw trappings of the outer world; while from beyond High Knob, whose crown is in cloud-land, and through the Gap, came the mountaineer in the primitive simplicity of home-spun and cowhide, wide-brimmed hat and poke-bonnet, quaint speech, and slouching gait. Through the Gap he came in two streams—the Virginians from Crab Orchard and Wise and Dickinson, the Kentuckians from Letcher and feudal Harlan, beyond the Big Black—and not a man carried a weapon in sight, for the stern spirit of that Police Guard at the Gap was respected wide and far. Into the town, which sits on a plateau some twenty feet above the level of the two rivers that all but encircle it, they poured, hitching their horses in the strip of woods that runs through the heart of the place, and broadens into a primeval park that, fan-like, opens on the oval, level field where all things happen on the Fourth of July. About the street they loitered—lovers hand in hand—eating fruit and candy and drinking soda-water, or sat on the curb-stone, mothers with babies at their breasts and toddling chil-

dren clinging close—all waiting for the celebration to begin.

It was a great day for the Hon. Samuel Budd. With a cheery smile and beaming goggles, he moved among his constituents, joking with yokels, saying nice things to mothers, paying gallantries to girls, and chuckling babies under the chin. He felt popular and he was—so popular that he had begun to see himself with prophetic eye in a congressional seat at no distant day; and yet, withal, he was not wholly happy.

“Do you know,” he said, “them fellers I made bets with in the tournament got together this morning and decided, all of ’em, that they wouldn’t let me off? Jerusalem, it’s most five hundred dollars!” And, looking the picture of dismay, he told me his dilemma.

It seems that his “dark horse” was none other than the Wild Dog, who had been practising at home for this tournament for nearly a year; and now that the Wild Dog was an outlaw, he, of course, wouldn’t and couldn’t come to the Gap. And said the Hon. Sam Budd:

“Them fellers says I bet I’d *bring in* a dark horse who would *win* this tournament, and if I don’t *bring* him in, I lose just the same as though I had brought him in and he hadn’t won. An’ I reckon they’ve got me.”

“I guess they have.”

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“ It would have been like pickin’ money off a blackberry-bush, for I was goin’ to let the Wild Dog have that black horse o’ mine—the steadiest and fastest runner in this country—and my, how that fellow can pick off the rings! He’s been a-practising for a year, and I believe he could run the point o’ that spear of his through a lady’s finger-ring.”

“ You’d better get somebody else.”

“ Ah—that’s it. The Wild Dog sent word he’d send over another feller, named Dave Branhams, who has been practising with him, who’s just as good, he says, as he is. I’m looking for him at twelve o’clock, an’ I’m goin’ to take him down an’ see what he can do on that black horse o’ mine. But if he’s no good, I lose five hundred, all right,” and he sloped away to his duties. For it was the Hon. Sam who was master of ceremonies that day. He was due now to read the Declaration of Independence in a poplar grove to all who would listen; he was to act as umpire at the championship baseball game in the afternoon, and he was to give the “ Charge ” to the assembled knights before the tournament.

At ten o’clock the games began—and I took the Blight and the little sister down to the “ grandstand ”—several tiers of backless benches with leaves for a canopy and the river singing through rhododendrons behind. There was

jumping broad and high, and a 100-yard dash and hurdling and throwing the hammer, which the Blight said were not interesting—they were too much like college sports—and she wanted to see the baseball game and the tournament. And yet Marston was in them all—dogged and resistless—his teeth set and his eyes anywhere but lifted toward the Blight, who, secretly proud, as I believed, but openly defiant, mentioned not his name even when he lost, which was twice only.

“ Pretty good, isn’t he? ” I said.

“ Who? ” she said indifferently.

“ Oh, nobody, ” I said, turning to smile, but not turning quickly enough.

“ What’s the matter with you? ” asked the Blight sharply.

“ Nothing, nothing at all, ” I said, and straightway the Blight thought she wanted to go home. The thunder of the Declaration was still rumbling in the poplar grove.

“ That’s the Hon. Sam Budd, ” I said.
“ Don’t you want to hear him? ”

“ I don’t care who it is—and I don’t want to hear him and I think you are hateful. ”

Ah, dear me, it was more serious than I thought. There were tears in her eyes, and I led the Blight and the little sister home—conscience-stricken and humbled. Still I would find that young jackanapes of an engineer and let

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him know that anybody who made the Blight unhappy must deal with me. I would take him by the neck and pound some sense into him. I found him lofty, uncommunicative, perfectly alien to any consciousness that I could have any knowledge of what was going on or any right to poke my nose into anybody's business—and I did nothing except go back to lunch—to find the Blight upstairs and the little sister indignant with me.

"You just let them alone," she said severely.

"Let who alone?" I said, lapsing into the speech of childhood.

"You—just—let—them—alone," she repeated.

"I've already made up my mind to that."

"Well, then!" she said, with an air of satisfaction, but why I don't know.

I went back to the poplar grove. The Declaration was over and the crowd was gone, but there was the Hon. Samuel Budd, mopping his brow with one hand, slapping his thigh with the other, and all but executing a pigeon-wing on the turf. He turned goggles on me that literally shone triumph.

"He's come—Dave Branham's come!" he said. "He's better than the Wild Dog. I've been trying him on the black horse and, Lord, how he can take them rings off! Ha, won't I

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get into them fellows who wouldn't let me off this morning! Oh, yes, I agreed to bring in a dark horse, and I'll bring him in all right. That five hundred is in my clothes now. You see that point yonder? Well, there's a hollow there and bushes all around. That's where I'm going to dress him. I've got his clothes all right and a name for him. This thing is a-goin' to come off accordin' to Hoyle, Ivanhoe, Four-Quarters-of-Beef, and all them mediæval fellows. Just watch me!"

I began to get newly interested, for that knight's name I suddenly recalled. Little Buck, the Wild Dog's brother, had mentioned him, when we were over in the Kentucky hills, as pracising with the Wild Dog—as being "mighty good, but nowhar 'longside o' Mart." So the Hon. Sam might have a good substitute, after all, and being a devoted disciple of Sir Walter, I knew his knight would rival, in splendor at least, any that rode with King Arthur in days of old.

The Blight was very quiet at lunch, as was the little sister, and my effort to be jocose was a lamentable failure. So I gave news.

"The Hon. Sam has a substitute." No curiosity and no question.

"Who—did you say? Why, Dave Branham, a friend of the Wild Dog. Don't you remember

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Buck telling us about him?" No answer. "Well, I do—and, by the way, I saw Buck and one of the big sisters just a while ago. Her name is Mollie. Dave Branham, you will recall, is her sweetheart. The other big sister had to stay at home with her mother and little Cindy, who's sick. Of course, I didn't ask them about Mart—the Wild Dog. They knew I knew and they wouldn't have liked it. The Wild Dog's around, I understand, but he won't dare show his face. Every policeman in town is on the lookout for him." I thought the Blight's face showed a signal of relief.

"I'm going to play short-stop," I added.

"Oh!" said the Blight, with a smile, but the little sister said with some scorn:

"You!"

"I'll show you," I said, and I told the Blight about baseball at the Gap. We had introduced baseball into the region and the valley boys and mountain boys, being swift runners, throwing like a rifle-shot from constant practice with stones, and being hard as nails, caught the game quickly and with great ease. We beat them all the time at first, but now they were beginning to beat us. We had a league now, and this was the championship game for the pennant.

"It was right funny the first time we beat a native team. Of course, we got together and

cheered 'em. They thought we were cheering ourselves, so they got red in the face, rushed together and whooped it up for themselves for about half an hour."

The Blight almost laughed.

"We used to have to carry our guns around with us at first when we went to other places, and we came near having several fights."

"Oh!" said the Blight excitedly. "Do you think there might be a fight this afternoon?"

"Don't know," I said, shaking my head. "It's pretty hard for eighteen people to fight when nine of them are policemen and there are forty more around. Still the crowd might take a hand."

This, I saw, quite thrilled the Blight and she was in good spirits when we started out.

"Marston doesn't pitch this afternoon," I said to the little sister. "He plays first base. He's saving himself for the tournament. He's done too much already." The Blight merely turned her head while I was speaking. "And the Hon. Sam will not act as umpire. He wants to save his voice—and his head."

The seats in the "grandstand" were in the sun now, so I left the girls in a deserted bandstand that stood on stilts under trees on the southern side of the field, and on a line midway between third base and the position of short-stop.

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Now there is no enthusiasm in any sport that equals the excitement aroused by a rural baseball game and I never saw the enthusiasm of that game outdone except by the excitement of the tournament that followed that afternoon. The game was close and Marston and I assuredly were stars—Marston one of the first magnitude. “Goose-egg” on one side matched “goose-egg” on the other until the end of the fifth inning, when the engineer knocked a home-run. Spectators threw their hats into the trees, yelled themselves hoarse, and I saw several old mountaineers who understood no more of baseball than of the lost *digamma* in Greek going wild with the general contagion. During these innings I had “assisted” in two doubles and had fired in three “daisy-cutters” to first myself in spite of the guying I got from the opposing rooters. “Four-eyes” they called me on account of my spectacles until a new nickname came at the last half of the ninth inning, when we were in the field with the score four to three in our favor. It was then that a small, fat boy with a paper megaphone longer than he was waddled out almost to first base and levelling his trumpet at me, thundered out in a sudden silence:

“Hello, Foxy Grandpa!” That was too much. I got rattled, and when there were three men on bases and two out, a swift grounder came

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to me, I fell—catching it—and threw wildly to first from my knees. I heard shouts of horror, anger, and distress from everywhere and my own heart stopped beating—I had lost the game—and then Marston leaped in the air—surely it must have been four feet—caught the ball with his left hand and dropped back on the bag. The sound of his foot on it and the runner's was almost simultaneous, but the umpire said Marston's was there first. Then bedlam! One of my brothers was umpire and the captain of the other team walked threateningly out toward him, followed by two of his men with baseball bats. As I started off myself toward them I saw, with the corner of my eye, another brother of mine start in a run from the left field, and I wondered why a third, who was scoring, sat perfectly still in his chair, particularly as a well-known, red-headed tough from one of the mines who had been officiously antagonistic ran toward the pitcher's box directly in front of him. Instantly a dozen of the Guard sprang toward it, some man pulled his pistol, a billy cracked straightway on his head, and in a few minutes order was restored. And still the brother scoring hadn't moved from his chair, and I spoke to him hotly.

"Keep your shirt on," he said easily, lifting his score-card with his left hand and showing his right clinched about his pistol under it.

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"I was just waiting for that red-head to make a move. I guess I'd have got him first."

I walked back to the Blight and the little sister and both of them looked very serious and frightened.

"I don't think I want to see a real fight, after all," said the Blight. "Not this afternoon."

It was a little singular and prophetic, but just as the words left her lips one of the Police Guard handed me a piece of paper.

"Somebody in the crowd must have dropped it in my pocket," he said. On the paper were scrawled these words:

"Look out for the Wild Dog!"

I sent the paper to Marston.

VII

AT LAST—THE TOURNAMENT

AT last—the tournament!
Ever afterward the Hon. Samuel Budd called it “The Gentle and Joyous Passage of Arms—not of Ashby—but of the Gap, by-suh!” The Hon. Samuel had arranged it as nearly after Sir Walter as possible. And a sudden leap it was from the most modern of games to a game most ancient.

No knights of old ever jousted on a lovelier field than the green little valley toward which the Hon. Sam waved one big hand. It was level, shorn of weeds, elliptical in shape, and bound in by trees that ran in a semicircle around the bank of the river, shut in the southern border, and ran back to the northern extremity in a primeval little forest that wood-thrushes, even then, were making musical—all of it shut in by a wall of living green, save for one narrow space through which the knights were to enter. In front waved Wallens’ leafy ridge and behind rose the Cumberland Range shouldering itself spur by spur,

into the coming sunset and crashing eastward into the mighty bulk of Powell's Mountain, which loomed southward from the head of the valley—all nodding sunny plumes of chestnut.

The Hon. Sam had seen us coming from afar apparently, had come forward to meet us, and he was in high spirits.

"I am Prince John and Waldemar and all the rest of 'em this day," he said, "and 'it is thus,' " quoting Sir Walter, "that we set the dutiful example of loyalty to the Queen of Love and Beauty, and are ourselves her guide to the throne which she must this day occupy." And so saying, the Hon. Sam marshalled the Blight to a seat of honor next his own.

"And how do you know she is going to be the Queen of Love and Beauty?" asked the little sister. The Hon. Sam winked at me.

"Well, this tournament lies between two gallant knights. One will make her the Queen of his own accord, if he wins, and if the other wins, he's got to, or I'll break his head. I've given orders." And the Hon. Sam looked about right and left on the people who were his that day.

"Observe the nobles and ladies," he said, still following Sir Walter, and waving at the townspeople and visitors in the rude grandstand. "Observe the yeomanry and spectators of a bet-

ter degree than the mere vulgar"—waving at the crowd on either side of the stand—"and the promiscuous multitude down the river banks and over the woods and clinging to the tree-tops and to yon telegraph-pole. And there is my herald"—pointing to the cornetist of the local band—"and wait—by my halidom—please just wait until you see my knight on that black charger o' mine."

The Blight and the little sister were convulsed and the Hon. Sam went on:

"Look at my men-at-arms"—the volunteer policemen with bulging hip-pockets, dangling billies and gleaming shields of office—"and at my refreshment tents behind"—where peanuts and pink lemonade were keeping the multitude busy—"and my attendants"—colored gentlemen with sponges and water-buckets—"the armorers and farriers haven't come yet. But my knight—I got his clothes in New York—just wait—Love of Ladies and Glory to the Brave!" Just then there was a commotion on the free seats on one side of the grandstand. A darky starting, in all ignorance, to mount them was stopped and jostled none too good-naturedly back to the ground.

"And see," mused the Hon. Sam, "in lieu of the dog of an unbeliever we have a dark analogy in that son of Ham."

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The little sister plucked me by the sleeve and pointed toward the entrance. Outside and leaning on the fence were Mollie, the big sister, and little Buck. Straightway I got up and started for them. They hung back, but I persuaded them to come, and I led them to seats two tiers below the Blight—who, with my little sister, rose smiling to greet them and shake hands—much to the wonder of the nobles and ladies close about, for Mollie was in brave and dazzling array, blushing fiercely, and little Buck looked as though he would die of such conspicuousness. No embarrassing questions were asked about Mart or Dave Branham, but I noticed that Mollie had purple and crimson ribbons clinched in one brown hand. The purpose of them was plain, and I whispered to the Blight:

“She’s going to pin them on Dave’s lance.”
The Hon. Sam heard me.

“Not on your life,” he said emphatically. “I ain’t takin’ chances,” and he nodded toward the Blight. “She’s got to win, no matter who loses.” He rose to his feet suddenly.

“Glory to the Brave—they’re comin’! Toot that horn, son,” he said; “they’re comin’,” and the band burst into discordant sounds that would have made the “wild, barbaric music” on the field of Ashby sound like a lullaby. The Blight stifled her laughter over that amazing music

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with her handkerchief, and even the Hon. Sam scowled.

"Gee!" he said; "it is pretty bad, isn't it?"

"Here they come!"

The nobles and ladies on the grandstand, the yeomanry and spectators of better degree, and the promiscuous multitude began to sway expectantly and over the hill came the knights, single file, gorgeous in velvets and in caps, with waving plumes and with polished spears, vertical, resting on the right stirrup foot and gleaming in the sun.

"A goodly array!" murmured the Hon. Sam.

A crowd of small boys gathered at the fence below, and I observed the Hon. Sam's pockets bulging with peanuts.

"Largesse!" I suggested.

"Good!" he said, and rising he shouted:

"Largessy! largessy!" scattering peanuts by the handful among the scrambling urchins.

Down wound the knights behind the back stand of the baseball field, and then, single file, in front of the nobles and ladies, before whom they drew up and faced, saluting with inverted spears.

The Hon. Sam arose—his truncheon a hickory stick—and in a stentorian voice asked the names of the doughty knights who were there to

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win glory for themselves and the favor of fair women.

Not all will be mentioned, but among them was the Knight of the Holston—Athelstanie in build—in black stockings, white negligee shirt, with Byronic collar, and a broad crimson sash tied with a bow at his right side. There was the Knight of the Green Valley, in green and gold, a green hat with a long white plume, lace ruffles at his sleeves, and buckles on dancing-pumps; a bonny fat knight of Maxwelton Braes, in Highland kilts and a plaid; and the Knight at Large.

“He ought to be caged,” murmured the Hon. Sam; for the Knight at Large wore plum-colored velvet, red baseball stockings, held in place with safety-pins, white tennis shoes, and a very small hat with a very long plume, and the dye was already streaking his face. Marston was the last—sitting easily on his iron gray.

“And your name, Sir Knight?”

“The Discarded,” said Marston, with steady eyes. I felt the Blight start at my side and side-wise I saw that her face was crimson.

The Hon. Sam sat down, muttering, for he did not like Marston:

“Wenchless springal!”

Just then my attention was riveted on Mollie and little Buck. Both had been staring silently at the knights as though they were apparitions,

but when Marston faced them I saw Buck clutch his sister's arm suddenly and say something excitedly in her ear. Then the mouths of both tightened fiercely and their eyes seemed to be darting lightning at the unconscious knight, who suddenly saw them, recognized them, and smiled past them at me. Again Buck whispered, and from his lips I could make out what he said:

"I wonder whar's Dave?" but Mollie did not answer.

"Which is yours, Mr. Budd?" asked the little sister. The Hon. Sam had leaned back with his thumbs in the armholes of his white waistcoat.

"He ain't come yet. I told him to come last."

The crowd waited and the knights waited—so long that the Mayor rose in his seat some twenty feet away and called out:

"Go ahead, Budd."

"You jus' wait a minute—my man ain't come yet," he said easily, but from various places in the crowd came jeering shouts from the men with whom he had wagered and the Hon. Sam began to look anxious.

"I wonder what is the matter?" he added in a lower tone. "I dressed him myself more than an hour ago and I told him to come last, but I

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didn't mean for him to wait till Christmas—ah!”

The Hon. Sam sat back in his seat again. From somewhere had come suddenly the blare of a solitary trumpet that rang in echoes around the amphitheatre of the hills and, a moment later, a dazzling something shot into sight above the mound that looked like a ball of fire, coming in mid-air. The new knight wore a shining helmet and the Hon. Sam chuckled at the murmur that rose and then he sat up suddenly. There was no face under that helmet—the Hon. Sam's knight was *masked* and the Hon. Sam slapped his thigh with delight.

“Bully—bully! I never thought of it—I never thought of it—bully!”

This was thrilling, indeed—but there was more; the strange knight's body was cased in a flexible suit of glistening mail, his spear point, when he raised it on high, shone like silver, and he came on like a radiant star—on the Hon. Sam's charger, white-bridled, with long mane and tail and black from tip of nose to tip of that tail as midnight. The Hon. Sam was certainly doing well. At a slow walk the stranger drew alongside of Marston and turned his spear point downward.

“Gawd!” said an old dardy. “Kuklux done come again.” And, indeed, it looked like a Ku-

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klux mask, white, dropping below the chin, and with eye-holes through which gleamed two bright fires.

The eyes of Buck and Mollie were turned from Marston at last, and open-mouthed they stared.

"Hit's the same hoss—hit's Dave!" said Buck aloud.

"Well, my Lord!" said Mollie simply.

The Hon. Sam rose again.

"And who is Sir Tardy Knight that hither comes with masked face?" he asked courteously. He got no answer.

"What's your name, son?"

The white mask puffed at the wearer's lips.

"The Knight of the Cumberland," was the low, muffled reply.

"Make him take that thing off!" shouted some one.

"What's he got it on fer?" shouted another.

"I don't know, friend," said the Hon. Sam; "but it is not my business nor prithee thine; since by the laws of the tournament a knight may ride masked for a specified time or until a particular purpose is achieved, that purpose being, I wot, victory for himself and for me a handful of byzants from thee."

"Now, go ahead, Budd," called the Mayor, again. "Are you going crazy?"

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The Hon. Sam stretched out his arms once to loosen them for gesture, thrust his chest out, and uplifted his chin: "Fair ladies, nobles of the realm, and good knights," he said sonorously, and he raised one hand to his mouth and behind it spoke aside to me:

"How's my voice—how's my voice?"

"Great!"

His question was genuine, for the mask of humor had dropped and the man was transformed. I knew his inner seriousness, his oratorical command of good English, and I knew the habit, not uncommon among stump-speakers in the South, of falling, through humor, carelessness, or for the effect of flattering comradeship, into all the lingual sins of rural speech; but I was hardly prepared for the soaring flight the Hon. Sam took now. He started with one finger pointed heavenward:

"The knights are dust

And their good swords are rust ;

Their souls are with the saints, we trust."

"Scepticism is but a harmless phantom in these mighty hills. We *believe* that with the saints is the *good* knight's soul, and if, in the radiant unknown, the eyes of those who have gone before can pierce the little shadow that lies between, we know that the good knights of old

look gladly down on these good knights of to-day. For it is good to be remembered. The tireless struggle for name and fame since the sunrise of history attests it; and the ancestry worship in the East and the world-wide hope of immortality show the fierce hunger in the human soul that the memory of it not only shall not perish from this earth, but that, across the Great Divide, it shall live on—neither forgetting nor forgotten. You are here in memory of those good knights to prove that the age of chivalry is not gone; that though their good swords are rust, the stainless soul of them still illumines every harmless spear point before me and makes it a torch that shall reveal, in your own hearts still aflame, their courage, their chivalry, their sense of protection for the weak, and the honor in which they held pure women, brave men, and almighty God.

“The tournament, some say, goes back to the walls of Troy. The form of it passed with the windmills that Don Quixote charged. It is with you to keep the high spirit of it an ever-burning vestal fire. It was a deadly play of old—it is a harmless play to you this day. But the prowess of the game is unchanged; for the skill to strike those pendant rings is no less than was the skill to strike armor-joint, visor, or plumèd crest. It was of old an exercise for deadly combat on the

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field of battle; it is no less an exercise now to you for the field of life—for the quick eye, the steady nerve, and the deft hand which shall help you strike the mark at which, outside these lists, you aim. And the crowning triumph is still just what it was of old—that to the victor the Rose of his world—made by him the Queen of Love and Beauty for us all—shall give her smile and with her own hands place on his brow a thornless crown.”

Perfect silence honored the Hon. Samuel Budd. The Mayor was nodding vigorous approval, the jeering ones kept still, and when after the last deep-toned word passed like music from his lips the silence held sway for a little while before the burst of applause came. Every knight had straightened in his saddle and was looking very grave. Marston's eyes never left the speaker's face, except once, when they turned with an unconscious appeal, I thought, to the downcast face of Blight—whereat the sympathetic little sister seemed close to tears. The Knight of the Cumberland shifted in his saddle as though he did not quite understand what was going on, and once Mollie, seeing the eyes through the mask-holes fixed on her, blushed furiously, and little Buck, grinned back a delighted recognition. The Hon. Sam sat down, visibly affected by his own eloquence;

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slowly he wiped his face and then he rose again.

"Your colors, Sir Knights," he said, with a commanding wave of his truncheon, and one by one the knights spurred forward and each held his lance into the grandstand that some fair one might tie thereon the colors he was to wear. Marston, without looking at the Blight, held his up to the little sister, and the Blight carelessly turned her face while the demure sister was busy with her ribbons, but I noticed that the little ear next to me was tingling red for all her brave look of unconcern. Only the Knight of the Cumberland sat still.

"What!" said the Hon. Sam, rising to his feet, his eyes twinkling and his mask of humor on again; "sees this maskèd springal"—the Hon. Sam seemed much enamored of that ancient word—"no maid so fair that he will not beg from her the boon of colors gay that he may carry them to victory and receive from her hands a wreath therefor?" Again the Knight of the Cumberland seemed not to know that the Hon. Sam's winged words were meant for him, so the statesman translated them into a mutual vernacular.

"Remember what I told you, son," he said. "Hold up yo' spear here to some one of these gals jes' like the other fellows are doin'," and

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as he sat down he tried surreptitiously to indicate the Blight with his index finger, but the knight failed to see and the Blight's face was so indignant and she rebuked him with such a knife-like whisper that, humbled, the Hon. Sam collapsed in his seat, muttering:

"The fool don't know you—he don't know you."

For the Knight of the Cumberland had turned the black horse's head and was riding, like Ivanhoe, in front of the nobles and ladies, his eyes burning up at them through the holes in his white mask. Again he turned, his mask still uplifted, and the behavior of the beauties there, as on the field of Ashby, was no whit changed: "Some blushed, some assumed an air of pride and dignity, some looked straight forward and essayed to seem utterly unconscious of what was going on, some drew back in alarm which was perhaps affected, some endeavored to forbear smiling and there were two or three who laughed outright." Only none "dropped a veil over her charms" and thus none incurred the suspicion, as on that field of Ashby, that she was "a beauty of ten years' standing" whose motive, gallant Sir Walter supposes in defence, however, was doubtless "a surfeit of such vanities and a willingness to give a fair chance to the rising beauties of the age." But the most conscious of the fair was

Mollie below, whose face was flushed and whose brown fingers were nervously twisting the ribbons in her lap, and I saw Buck nudge her and heard him whisper:

"Dave ain't going to pick *you* out, I tell ye. I heered Mr. Budd thar myself tell him he *had* to pick out some other gal."

"You hush!" said Mollie indignantly.

It looked as though the Knight of the Cumberland had grown rebellious and meant to choose whom he pleased, but on his way back the Hon. Sam must have given more surreptitious signs, for the Knight of the Cumberland reined in before the Blight and held up his lance to her. Straightway the colors that were meant for Marston fluttered from the Knight of the Cumberland's spear. I saw Marston bite his lips and I saw Mollie's face aflame with fury and her eyes darting lightning—no longer at Marston now, but at the Blight. The mountain girl held nothing against the city girl because of the Wild Dog's infatuation, but that her own lover, no matter what the Hon. Sam said, should give his homage also to the Blight, in her own presence, was too much. Mollie looked around no more. Again the Hon. Sam rose.

"Love of ladies," he shouted, "splintering of lances! Stand forth, gallant knights. Fair eyes look upon your deeds! Toot again, son!"



The Knight of the Cumberland reined in before the Blight.

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Now just opposite the grandstand was a post some ten feet high, with a small beam projecting from the top toward the spectators. From the end of this hung a wire, the end of which was slightly upturned in line with the course, and on the tip of this wire a steel ring about an inch in diameter hung lightly. Nearly forty yards below this was a similar ring similarly arranged; and at a similar distance below that was still another, and at the blast from the Hon. Sam's herald, the gallant knights rode slowly, two by two, down the lists to the western extremity—the Discarded Knight and the Knight of the Cumberland, stirrup to stirrup, riding last—where they all drew up in line, some fifty yards beyond the westernmost post. This distance they took that full speed might be attained before jousting at the first ring, since the course—much over one hundred yards long—must be covered in seven seconds or less, which was no slow rate of speed. The Hon. Sam arose again:

“The Knight of the Holston!”

Farther down the lists a herald took up the same cry and the good knight of Athelstanie build backed his steed from the line and took his place at the head of the course.

With his hickory truncheon the Hon. Sam signed to his trumpeter to sound the onset.

“Now, son!” he said.

With the blare of the trumpet Athelstane sprang from his place and came up the course, his lance at rest; a tinkling sound and the first ring slipped down the knight's spear and when he swept past the last post there was a clapping of hands, for he held three rings triumphantly aloft. And thus they came, one by one, until each had run the course three times, the Discarded jousting next to the last and the Knight of the Cumberland, riding with a reckless Cave, Adsum air, the very last. At the second joust it was quite evident that the victory lay between these two, as they only had not lost a single ring, and when the black horse thundered by, the Hon. Sam shouted " Brave lance! " and jollied his betting enemies, while Buck hugged himself triumphantly and Mollie seemed temporarily to lose her chagrin and anger in pride of her lover, Dave. On the third running the Knight of the Cumberland excited a sensation by sitting upright, waving his lance up and down between the posts and lowering it only when the ring was within a few feet of its point. His recklessness cost him one ring, but as the Discarded had lost one, they were still tied, with eight rings to the credit of each, for the first prize. Only four others were left—the Knight of the Holston and the Knight of the Green Valley tying with seven rings for second prize, and the fat Maxwellton

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Braes and the Knight at Large tying with six rings for the third. The crowd was eager now and the Hon. Sam confident. On came the Knight at Large, his face a rainbow, his plume wilted and one red baseball stocking slipped from its moorings—two rings! On followed the fat Maxwellton, his plaid streaming and his kilts flapping about his fat legs—also two rings!

“Egad!” quoth the Hon. Sam. “Did yon lusty trencherman of Annie Laurie’s but put a few more layers of goodly flesh about his ribs, thereby projecting more his frontal Falstaffian proportions, by my halidom, he would have to joust tandem!”

On came Athelstane and the Knight of the Green Valley, both with but two rings to their credit, and on followed the Discarded, riding easily, and the Knight of the Cumberland again waving his lance between the posts, each with three rings on his spear. At the end the Knight at Large stood third, Athelstane second, and the Discarded and the Knight of the Cumberland stood side by side at the head of the course, still even, and now ready to end the joust, for neither on the second trial had missed a ring.

The excitement was intense now. Many people seemed to know who the Knight of the Cumberland was, for there were shouts of “Go it, Dave!” from everywhere; the rivalry of class

had entered the contest and now it was a conflict between native and "furriner." The Hon. Sam was almost beside himself with excitement; now and then some man with whom he had made a bet would shout jeeringly at him and the Hon. Sam would shout back defiance. But when the trumpet sounded he sat leaning forward with his brow wrinkled and his big hands clinched tight. Marston sped up the course first—three rings—and there was a chorus of applauding yells.

"His horse is gittin' tired," said the Hon. Sam jubilantly, and the Blight's face, I noticed, showed for the first time faint traces of indignation. The Knight of the Cumberland was taking no theatrical chances now and he came through the course with level spear and, with three rings on it, he shot by like a thunderbolt.

"Hooray!" shouted the Hon. Sam. "Lord, what a horse!" For the first time the Blight, I observed, failed to applaud, while Mollie was clapping her hands and Buck was giving out shrill yells of encouragement. At the next tilt the Hon. Sam had his watch in his hand and when he saw the Discarded digging in his spurs he began to smile and he was looking at his watch when the little tinkle in front told him that the course was run.

"Did he get 'em all?"

"Yes, he got 'em all," mimicked the Blight.

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"Yes, an' he just did make it," chuckled the Hon. Sam. The Discarded had wheeled his horse aside from the course to watch his antagonist. He looked pale and tired—almost as tired as his foam-covered steed—but his teeth were set and his face was unmoved as the Knight of the Cumberland came on like a demon, sweeping off the last ring with a low, rasping oath of satisfaction.

"I never seed Dave ride that-a-way afore," said Mollie.

"Me, neither," chimed in Buck.

The nobles and ladies were waving handkerchiefs, clapping hands, and shouting. The spectators of better degree were throwing up their hats and from every part of the multitude the same hoarse shout of encouragement rose:

"Go it, Dave! Hooray for Dave!" while the boy on the telegraph-pole was seen to clutch wildly at the crossbar on which he sat—he had come near tumbling from his perch.

The two knights rode slowly back to the head of the lists, where the Discarded was seen to dismount and tighten his girth.

"He's tryin' to git time to rest," said the Hon. Sam. "Toot, son!"

"Shame!" said the little sister and the Blight both at once so severely that the Hon. Sam quickly raised his hand.

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"Hold on," he said, and with hand still uplifted he waited till Marston was mounted again. "Now!"

The Discarded came on, using his spurs with every jump, the red of his horse's nostrils showing that far away, and he swept on, spearing off the rings with deadly accuracy and holding the three aloft, but having no need to pull in his panting steed, who stopped of his own accord. Up went a roar, but the Hon. Sam, covertly glancing at his watch, still smiled. That watch he pulled out when the Knight of the Cumberland started and he smiled still when he heard the black horse's swift, rhythmic beat and he looked up only when that knight, shouting to his horse, moved his lance up and down before coming to the last ring and, with a dare-devil yell, swept it from the wire.

"Tied—tied!" was the shout; "they've got to try it again! they've got to try it again!"

The Hon. Sam rose, with his watch in one hand and stilling the tumult with the other. Dead silence came at once.

"I fear me," he said, "that the good knight, the Discarded, has failed to make the course in the time required by the laws of the tournament." Bedlam broke loose again and the Hon. Sam waited, still gesturing for silence.

"Summon the time-keeper!" he said.

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The time-keeper appeared from the middle of the field and nodded.

“Eight seconds!”

“The Knight of the Cumberland wins,” said the Hon Sam.

The little sister, unconscious of her own sad face, nudged me to look at the Blight—there were tears in her eyes.

Before the grandstand the knights slowly drew up again. Marston's horse was so lame and tired that he dismounted and let a darky boy lead him under the shade of the trees. But he stood on foot among the other knights, his arms folded, worn out and vanquished, but taking his bitter medicine like a man. I thought the Blight's eyes looked pityingly upon him.

The Hon. Sam arose with a crown of laurel leaves in his hand:

“You have fairly and gallantly won, Sir Knight of the Cumberland, and it is now your right to claim and receive from the hands of the Queen of Love and Beauty the chaplet of honor which your skill has justly deserved. Advance, Sir Knight of the Cumberland, and dismount!”

The Knight of the Cumberland made no move nor sound.

“Get off yo' hoss, son,” said the Hon. Sam kindly, “and get down on yo' knees at the feet

of them steps. This fair young Queen is a-goin' to put this chaplet on your shinin' brow. That horse'll stand."

The Knight of the Cumberland, after a moment's hesitation, threw his leg over the saddle and came to the steps with a slouching gait and looking about him right and left. The Blight, blushing prettily, took the chaplet and went down the steps to meet him.

"Unmask!" I shouted.

"Yes, son," said the Hon. Sam, "take that rag off."

Then Mollie's voice, clear and loud, startled the crowd. "You better not, Dave Branham, fer if you do and this other gal puts that thing on you, you'll never——" What penalty she was going to inflict, I don't know, for the Knight of the Cumberland, half kneeling, sprang suddenly to his feet and interrupted her. "Wait a minute, will ye?" he said almost fiercely, and at the sound of his voice Mollie rose to her feet and her face blanched.

"Lord God!" she said almost in anguish, and then she dropped quickly to her seat again.

The Knight of the Cumberland had gone back to his horse as though to get something from his saddle. Like lightning he vaulted into the saddle, and as the black horse sprang toward the opening tore his mask from his face, turned

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in his stirrups, and brandished his spear with a yell of defiance, while a dozen voices shouted:

"The Wild Dog!" Then was there an uproar.

"Goddle mighty!" shouted the Hon. Sam. "I didn't do it, I swear I didn't know it. He's tricked me—he's tricked me! Don't shoot—you might hit that hoss!"

There was no doubt about the Hon. Sam's innocence. Instead of turning over an outlaw to the police, he had brought him into the inner shrine of law and order and he knew what a political asset for his enemies that insult would be. And there was no doubt of the innocence of Mollie and Buck as they stood, Mollie wringing her hands and Buck with open mouth and startled face. There was no doubt about the innocence of anybody other than Dave Branham and the dare-devil Knight of the Cumberland.

Marston had clutched at the Wild Dog's bridle and missed and the outlaw struck savagely at him with his spear. Nobody dared to shoot because of the scattering crowd, but every knight and every mounted policeman took out after the outlaw and the beating of hoofs pounded over the little mound and toward Poplar Hill. Marston ran to his horse at the upper end, threw his saddle on, and hesitated—there were enough after the Wild Dog and his horse was blown.

He listened to the yells and sounds of the chase encircling Poplar Hill. The outlaw was making for Lee. All at once the yells and hoof-beats seemed to sound nearer and Marston listened, astonished. The Wild Dog had wheeled and was coming back; he was going to make for the Gap, where sure safety lay. Marston buckled his girth and as he sprang on his horse, unconsciously taking his spear with him, the Wild Dog dashed from the trees at the far end of the field. As Marston started the Wild Dog saw him, pulled something that flashed from under his coat of mail, thrust it back again, and brandishing his spear, he came, full speed and yelling, up the middle of the field. It was a strange thing to happen in these modern days, but Marston was an officer of the law and was between the Wild Dog and the Ford and liberty through the Gap, into the hills. The Wild Dog was an outlaw. It was Marston's duty to take him.

The law does not prescribe with what weapon the lawless shall be subdued, and Marston's spear was the only weapon he had. Moreover, the Wild Dog's yell was a challenge that set his blood afire and the girl both loved was looking on. The crowd gathered the meaning of the joust—the knights were crashing toward each other with spears at rest. There were a few surprised oaths from men, a few low cries from



But every knight and every mounted policeman took out after the outlaw.

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women, and then dead silence in which the sound of hoofs on the hard turf was like thunder. The Blight's face was white and the little sister was gripping my arm with both hands. A third horseman shot into view out of the woods at right angles, to stop them, and it seemed that the three horses must crash together in a heap. With a moan the Blight buried her face on my shoulder. She shivered when the muffled thud of body against body and the splintering of wood rent the air; a chorus of shrieks arose about her, and when she lifted her frightened face Marston, the Discarded, was limp on the ground, his horse was staggering to his feet, and the Wild Dog was galloping past her, his helmet gleaming, his eyes ablaze, his teeth set, the handle of his broken spear clinched in his right hand, and blood streaming down the shoulder of the black horse. She heard the shots that were sent after him, she heard him plunge into the river, and then she saw and heard no more.

VIII

THE KNIGHT PASSES

A TELEGRAM summoned the Blight home next day. Marston was in bed with a ragged wound in the shoulder, and I took her to tell him good-by. I left the room for a few minutes, and when I came back their hands were unclasping, and for a Discarded Knight the engineer surely wore a happy though pallid face.

That afternoon the train on which we left the Gap was brought to a sudden halt in Wildcat Valley by a piece of red flannel tied to the end of a stick that was planted midway the track. Across the track, farther on, lay a heavy piece of timber, and it was plain that somebody meant that, just at that place, the train must stop. The Blight and I were seated on the rear platform and the Blight was taking a last look at her beloved hills. When the train started again, there was a cracking of twigs overhead and a shower of rhododendron leaves and flowers dropped from the air at the feet of the Blight. And when we pulled away from the high-walled

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cut we saw, motionless on a little mound, a black horse, and on him, motionless, the Knight of the Cumberland, the helmet on his head (that the Blight might know who he was, no doubt), and both hands clasping the broken handle of his spear, which rested across the pommel of his saddle. Impulsively the Blight waved her hand to him and I could not help waving my hat; but he sat like a statue and, like a statue, sat on, simply looking after us as we were hurried along, until horse, broken shaft, and shoulders sank out of sight. And thus passed the Knight of the Cumberland with the last gleam that struck his helmet, spear-like, from the slanting sun.

THE END

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